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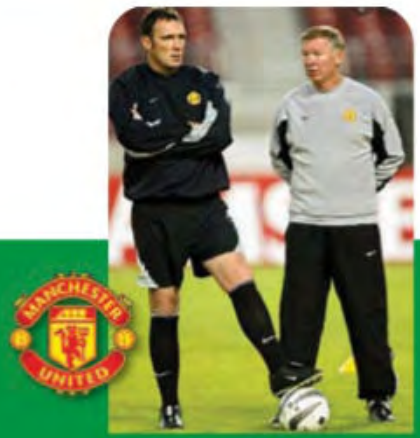

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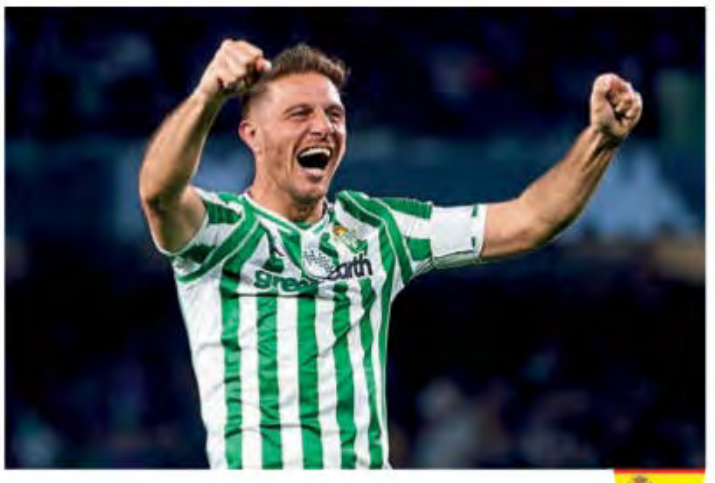

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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

England...a defaced mural of England forward Marcus Rashford is repaired by the artist, alongside messages of support

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FROM THE ASSISTANT EDITOR

It is said that there are five stages in the grieving process, starting with denial. In the week after the Euro 2020 final, I was sure that my wall planner must be mistaken – or lying. Surely there had to be another game? It couldn't all be over? Plenty of England fans, it seems, then moved quickly on to anger, and then bargaining: a change.org petition demanding the final be replayed gained just under 150,000 votes in two weeks.

Next comes depression – and the behaviour of many England fans both at Wembley and in the subsequent days definitely added to that feeling – before finally, acceptance. Now, with the 2021-22 European domestic season almost ready to begin, it is time to move on; the Euros were great, but there is plenty to be excited about for the campaign ahead.

> The Euros were great, but there is plenty to be excited about for the campaign ahead

The never-ending soap opera that is the Premier League is ready to burst back onto primetime, with transfer sagas and new managers teeing up another year of intriguing storylines, while a new cast of coaches in Serie A and the Bundesliga also promises plenty. The on-going financial meltdowns of Spain's two giants means that another topsy-turvy La Liga is on the cards, while Paris Saint-Germain will not accept another humiliating year of missing out on the Ligue 1 trophy.

All the major leagues have their own fair share of fascinating sub-plots and exciting new faces, and we've tried to cover them all in this season preview.

Jamie Evans, Assistant Editor

UK

Fall-out from Euro 2020 final continues

The FA has undertaken an official review of the Euro 2020 final, where thousands of ticketless fans gained access to Wembley leading to fighting breaking out inside the stadium.

Mark Bullingham, head of the association, has described the final as a "six-hour siege" by "lawless yobs". In a statement, he added: "We are determined to fully understand what happened outside and then inside Wembley Stadium. A key emphasis of the findings will be to ensure that lessons are learned and such disgraceful scenes are never able to be repeated."

UEFA have opened disciplinary proceedings into the FA, hitting them with four separate charges with regards to fan behaviour, which also includes the semi-final win over Denmark. In spite of the trouble, Wembley will still host the Champions League final in 2024.

Meanwhile, five arrests have been made in relation to the racist abuse of Marcus Rashford, Bukayo Saka and Jadon Sancho on social media. The three players – who all failed to score in the decisive penalty shootout – have been widely praised for their dignified responses to the abuse, with each releasing eloquent statements.

"I'm not going pretend that I didn't see the racial abuse that me and my brothers Marcus and Bukayo received after the game, but sadly it's nothing new," said Sancho. "As a society we need to do better, and hold these people accountable. Hate will never win."

"You don't get to stoke the fire...by labelling our anti-racism message as 'Gesture Politics' and then pretend to be disgusted when the very thing we're campaigning against happens"

England defender Tyrone Mings hits out at British home secretary Priti Patel

Wembley Way...the trouble started outside the stadium

"My penalty was not good enough, it should have gone in but I will never apologise for who I am and where I came from," added Rashford, whose mural in Manchester was defaced and then quickly restored in the aftermath of the final.

Saka also took a swipe at Instagram, Twitter and Facebook in his own statement, saying: "To the social media platforms, I don't want any child or adult to have to receive the hateful and hurtful messages that me, Marcus and Jadon have received this week. I knew instantly the kind of hate that I was about to receive and that is a sad reality that your powerful platforms are not doing enough to stop these messages."

Heroes... another Manchester mural for Saka, Rashford and Sancho

UK

Premier League player arrested

An unnamed Premier League footballer has been arrested on suspicion of child sex offences. Greater Manchester Police confirmed that they had arrested a 31-year-old, while Everton have suspended a first-team player pending a police investigation. They declined to mention whether it was the same man, saying they "would support the authorities with their inquiries".

HEROES & VILLAINS

Champions of champions...Cruz Azul celebrate

CRUZ AZUL

Two months on from winning their first league title in 24 years, the Mexican side have another trophy to add to their collection. In May, Cruz Azul ended their trophy drought by winning the Clausura, finishing three points clear of America, then followed it up by beating Apertura champs Leon in the Champion of Champions trophy.

RAUL JIMENEZ

The Wolverhampton Wanderers striker's playing career looked in serious doubt after the horrendous head injury he suffered against Arsenal last season. But after recovering from a fractured skull, the Mexican star made his long-awaited return in a friendly against Crewe Alexandra. "He's shaken it off like it never happened and it's like he's the same old Raul," said Wolves' captain on the day, John Ruddy.

MOGADISHU STADIUM

Somalia's national stadium saw a full crowd inside for the first time since 2004. Over 65,000 fans watched the top-of-the-table clash between Horseed and Mogadishu City Club, with thousands more turned away at the door. The game marked a significant triumph for the Somali Football Association, just over a year after re-taking control of the renovated stadium following years of unrest in the country.

MARTA & FORMIGA

The two Brazil legends added more records to their long list of achievements while on Olympic duty. Forward Marta became the first player to score in five different Games when opening the tournament with a brace against China, while 43-year-old Formiga also started, taking her Olympic appearances up to seven. The Sao Paulo midfielder has now played at every single Games since women's football was added to the Olympics in 1996.

ADIDAS

The sports brand came under fire from Manchester United women's player Millie Turner after they got her name wrong during the club's kit unveiling. A picture of the defender was accompanied by the caption, "Amy Turner", mistaking her for the Orlando Pride player. "Considering I've been at Manchester United for three years and an adidas athlete for two... you'd like to think adidas would get my name right," said Turner on Twitter.

HONDURAS

Germany's Olympic men's team walked off the field during a friendly with the Central American side after defender Jordan Torunarigha was allegedly racially abused. "[Jordan] said that he had been racially insulted for the second time. We decided to leave the pitch because it was against our values," explained Germany coach Stefan Kuntz. The Honduras team later said that the incident was a "misunderstanding on the pitch", but did not offer further explanation.

SPEZIA PLAYERS

The Serie A side have recently had an outbreak of COVID cases, and their club doctor has confirmed that it was due to two players. "We provided the first dose of the vaccine, but two players didn't want to do it. They consider themselves anti-vaxxers and a small cluster of cases then developed," explained professor Vincenzo Salini.

BOCA JUNIORS

Six of the Argentine club's players and officials were charged after they clashed with police following their Copa Libertadores exit to Atletico Mineiro. Boca reacted furiously to two of their goals – one in each leg – being ruled out by VAR, leading to violent clashes in the tunnel and dressing rooms after the second leg.

No goal...Boca's effort is ruled out

"I think Arsenal made a good decision on him and I think he is going to be a top player for Arsenal in the years to come"

Peter Verbeke, Anderlecht sporting director, on Albert Sambi Lokonga

Albert SAMBI LOKONGA

(Arsenal)

Sambi Lokonga is yet to earn his first Belgium cap, yet was close to a place in their Euro 2020 squad in place of Axel Witsel. Ultimately, the Borussia Dortmund midfielder was fit enough to travel and Lokonga had to settle for a place on the standby list, but a full call-up is likely to come soon enough.

In spite of his tender years (he turns 22 in October), he was named Anderlecht's club captain at the start of last season, and started 33 games as a key cog at the base of midfield. Capable of playing as a defensive holder or in a box-to-box role with a good passing range, he has been heartily recommended by both Anderlecht's sporting director Peter Verbeke and manager Vincent Kompany.

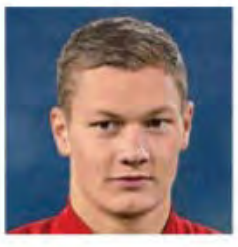
Interestingly, his older brother Paul-Jose M'Poku spent some time at North London rivals Tottenham Hotspur.

METINHO
(Manchester City)
City's third South America wonderkid purchase of the summer, following Kayky and Dario Sarmiento. Made his debut in Fluminense's midfield in March and likely to be loaned out to gain further experience.

Quinn SULLIVAN
(Philadelphia Union)
The 17-year-old's introduction to MLS was so perfect he may well have scripted it himself: scoring his first goal on his first start with an extraordinary bicycle-kick.

Ismael DOUKOURE
(Valenciennes)
Still playing in Ligue 2, yet the 18-year-old centre-back was the youngest player in the Men's Olympics tournament and is attracting plenty of interest.

Luka ROMERO
(Lazio)
After catching the eye as La Liga's youngest-ever player aged 15 with Mallorca last season, the Argentina Under-17 attacking midfielder has now earned a move to Lazio.



Kjell SCHERPEN
(Brighton & Hove Albion)
An absolute giant of a goalkeeper at 6ft 8in, the 21-year-old shot-stopper is still a work in progress having joined from Ajax, yet looks to have a bright future.

Lewis BATE
(Leeds United)
The highly-rated 18-year-old midfielder walked away from Chelsea in pursuit of regular football, with Leeds United snapping him up on a three-year deal.

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Mourinho's appointment the latest step in Serie A's revival

The wild celebration that greeted Italy's victory at Euro 2020 was not merely about the joy and glory of triumph at a major tournament. The songs, car horns and fireworks in Rome, Milan and Naples were more than that: they were also exuberant delight that Italian football is relevant again, that *Calcio* is back in the big time, and that players like Federico Chiesa, Leonardo Spinazzola and Gigi Donnarumma can charm the world.

For too many years football in Italy has endured an inferiority complex, believing the best teams and finest players were elsewhere.

When Italy played in dazzling style to beat Switzerland 3-0 among a crowd of Romans at the Stadio Olimpico, the locals were still full of doubt. They dared not believe the evidence of their own eyes; there had been too many false dawns and recent disappointment to be seduced into optimism. By the end of the thrilling ride to become European champions however, the sustained excellence of Roberto Mancini's side had restored confidence, ambition and excitement to Italian football.

It is in that very same stadium that the most dynamic change of the new domestic season will be seen: Jose Mourinho's arrival at AS Roma – a big name, a big personality, big expectation. Superstar foreign coaches have avoided Serie A for the past decade; indeed, Mourinho himself walked away from the league after the most successful season of his career, winning the treble with Internazionale in 2009-10.

It is impossible to exaggerate the level of enthusiasm and energy inspired by the news of his appointment, not just in Rome, but across the entire country. It is viewed as another symbol of change in tune with triumph at Euro 2020.

Mourinho has sounded all the correct notes in his opening days with typical verve. He was photographed driving around the club's training camp on a Vespa, and announced his entry to the fans with the words "*Daje Roma*". This captivated the supporters. *Daje* is a slang word in the city, unknown to outsiders. A rough translation is "Come on Roma", but only rough. It is much more – and that Mourinho bothered to find the perfect obscure word left the fans exultant.

Can he now find such quick precision with the Roma team, and do so at a big and complicated club where supporters are swift to complain, and where money for transfers will be more limited than Mourinho is accustomed to? The first signing was encouraging: the purchase of a high-class goalkeeper in Portugal international Rui Patricio.

Others will surely follow, but perhaps the key will be the clutch of Italians at the club. Injury will rob Roma of scintillating full-back Spinazzola for a few months, but there is experience and talent in players like Bryan Cristante, Lorenzo Pellegrini and Gianluca Mancini. There should also be the return from long-term injury of Italian football's most precious young talent, Nicolo Zaniolo, a skilful and goal-hungry forward.

There is more than enough quality for Mourinho to work with. Roma should be a top-four team, and if he is successful on the field they will have one of the most passionate army of fans as an extra man. They start 100 per cent behind their new boss. They see his charisma and trophies, and remain deaf to the noisy headlines from abroad that Mourinho's magic has faded.

Mourinho's appointment is the most headline-grabbing among several in Serie A. The return of Massimiliano Allegri has been greeted with vast enthusiasm by Juventus fans, while Lazio supporters are happily astonished to see a coach with the pedigree of Maurizio Sarri at the helm. The former Chelsea boss replaces Simone Inzaghi, who has taken over from Antonio Conte at Inter in another intriguing move.

Even before these appointments, there had already been signs of rejuvenation, for those willing to look. Atalanta, under the guidance of head coach Gian Piero Gasperini, have delivered some of the best football in Europe in the past two years with previously unsung players like Matteo Pessina. Elsewhere, last season's runners-up Milan look as close to restoring their former glory under Stefano Pioli as they have since their last title in 2011.

Gone are the days of Serie A being notoriously defensive: now it is the home of innovative, elite coaches. The opportunity for the league to restore itself at the top of European football has never been greater, and Mourinho and co. will be right at the heart of its rejuvenation.

Exciting... Mourinho's appointment was confirmed in May

> It is impossible to exaggerate the level of enthusiasm and energy inspired by the news of his appointment

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Third European club competition is a welcome restoration

At Villa Park on May 19, 1999, Christian Vieri and Pavel Nedved scored the goals that gave Lazio a 2-1 win over Mallorca and secured their place in football history as the last-ever winners of the European Cup Winners' Cup.

UEFA president Lennart Johansson and his executive committee had decided that the competition was an anachronism. Never mind that in its 39-year history, winners had included the likes of Ajax, Arsenal, Atletico Madrid, Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Chelsea, Juventus, Manchester City and United, and Milan.

However, the romance of the game had to bow to the bottom line. For Johansson's UEFA, the lottery of a cup competition did not conform to the all-commanding cash-safe concept of mini leagues.

Patronisingly, in an ominous pointer to the future, they decided that mixing the mighty and minnows was an anachronism. The formula allowed too many small, surprise clubs to sneak into their grand vision of how international club football might be "sold" to cash-rich broadcasting partners and sponsors.

The outcome of these deliberations was that UEFA slimmed down to two competitions, the elite Champions League in which the richer grew richer, and the UEFA Cup for the hopefully envious also-rans.

Trouble was, this ignored reality. The European football map had been redrawn less than a decade earlier by the collapse and fragmentation of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Bafflingly, UEFA was apparently blind to the fact that it was no longer a cosy, private little club of 35 nations but an elasticated net of 50-plus.

European Cup Winners' Cup... Manchester United won the trophy 30 years ago

All wanted their share of the international limelight, and the subsequent 20 years has demonstrated that however UEFA might have pulled and pushed its endlessly complex web of qualifying rounds the club competitions were no longer fit for purpose. Something to fill the Cup Winners' Cup gap was essential. Now, 22 years too late, we have it: the UEFA Europa Conference League.

> Something to fill the Cup Winners' Cup gap was essential. Now, 22 years too late, we have it: the UEFA Europa Conference League

The idea of reviving the third competition was down to Michel Platini, who had ousted Johansson as president in 2007 with a direct appeal to his new constituency of middle and lower-ranked associations. They offered their majority of votes at a price. That price was participation and a share-out. Hence UEFA's rush to adopt centralised TV marketing and sponsorship, accepted reluctantly by the majors "for the good of the game".

By 2018, when current president Aleksander Ceferin's exco approved the restoration of a third competition, Platini was banned and gone. Working out the format and slotting it into the European schedule took time but the outcome is probably as good as it is ever likely to be.

Coming up with the title was the next headache. The original working title was UEL2 until UEFA adopted the "conference" label familiar as a

representation of high-end competition in North America. Perhaps unfortunately it also possesses negative connotations as the former name of England's fifth tier.

One bright aspect of the restoration is that UEFA has capitalised on the opportunity to standardise its club competitions. Each will see a simultaneous group stage and then the now-traditional three knockout steps towards a single-leg final. Hence both the Europa League and the Conference League will feature 141 matches over 15 match weeks. Matches in both will be played on a Thursday with an extra early kick-off option for the Conference League.

Of course this would not be a UEFA competition if it were all clean and clear without a fixture twist in the tail.

In the case of the Conference League this means an additional knockout round before the round of 16. This will feature clubs who finish second in their groups plus third-ranked teams "relegated" from the Europa League. The ultimate winners earn the right to play in the Europa League the following season.

UEFA president Ceferin hailed the reorganisation for "making our club competitions more inclusive than ever before." As he said: "There was a widespread demand by all clubs to increase their chances of participating more regularly in European competition."

DON'T RULE OUT SUPER LEAGUE JUST YET

Any idea that Ceferin's Super League *bete noire* has vanished into the dustbin of football history is premature. Expect further developments later this autumn. Keeping the ball rolling is a Spanish court that has criticised the deal with which UEFA bought off the nine clubs who retreated from the project as a "disguised sanction".

Last April, Madrid's 17th Commercial Court issued an injunction barring UEFA from retaliatory action against the 12 founding clubs of the Super League. Subsequently Judge Manuel Ruiz de Lara referred UEFA's disciplinary threat against renegades Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus to the European Court of Justice for a ruling on a possible breach of EU competitions law.

If the Court should rule in the trio's favour, the fall-out could be as extensive as its Bosman Verdict back in 1995, in terms of undermining the authority of not only UEFA but also FIFA. Judge Ruiz de Lara has also urged UEFA to withdraw the "agreed sanctions" imposed on the nine clubs who abandoned the project.

Back in May, UEFA said that the nine (Arsenal, Atletico Madrid, Chelsea, Internazionale, Liverpool, Manchester City, Manchester United, Milan and Tottenham Hotspur) had accepted a series of "reinstatement measures." These included the forfeiture of five per cent of their European income for a season, a voluntary overall donation of €15m to the grassroots game plus signing up to a €100m fine in case of breach.

For Judge Ruiz de Lara the agreement was in itself a breach of his own original injunction.

EUROS EXPANSION UNDER CONSIDERATION

UEFA is informally considering whether to expand the European Championship finals from 24 to 32 teams. Such an expansion would mean more than half of UEFA's 55 members reaching the finals though it is unlikely this could be rushed through for Germany in 2024.

Everyone will welcome the return to the single-venue system. No one wants another 11-nation staging after the nonsensical mess which was Euro 2020.

Ceferin has conceded: "It's not correct that some teams have had to travel more than 10,000 kilometres and the others 1,000. It's also not fair to the fans. Some fans had to be in Rome and in a couple of days they had to be in Baku, a four-and-a-half-hour flight. I don't think we will do it again."

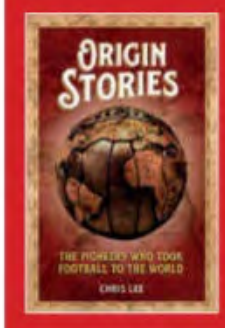
He could speak out because the concept was approved before his time. Ceferin had inherited the awful extravaganza from Michel Platini. The Frenchman came up with some good ideas during his presidency, such as Financial Fair Play. The Euro 2020 format was one of, if not the, worst.

Michel Platini...the Conference League was the brainchild of the former UEFA president

BOOKS THIS MONTH

THE FIX
By James Dixon (Pitch Publishing, £16.99)

The Fix: How the first Champions League was won and why we all lost is an examination of the 1992-93 Champions League season. The breakup of the USSR, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia gave UEFA a problem. There were more national league champions than their post-war competitions could handle. Against the backdrop of constant threats of a breakaway super league, the UEFA Champions League was born. *The Fix* looks at that first season, from its humble beginning on a Faroese hillside to its ultimate conclusion in a French courtroom.



ORIGIN STORIES
By Chris Lee (Pitch Publishing, £12.99)

Origin Stories: The pioneers who took football to the world charts the growth of the game in each major footballing country, from the very first kick to the first World Cup in 1930. From muddy fields to colossal, purpose-built stadiums, football is a story of class, gender, race and politics. Along the way, you'll meet the people who established football around the world and discover the challenges they faced.

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Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Good riddance to the away goals rule

The news that the away goals rule will not be used in UEFA competition from this season brought a flurry of gloomy prognostication. The game will be ruined, the naysayers insist. Away teams, disincentivised, will sit deep, especially in the first leg, knowing that a 0-0 draw is a great result because in the second leg they will potentially have an additional half hour of extra-time in front of their own fans in which to force a win. And perhaps that is what will happen – but if it is, it will require major changes.

Firstly, such pessimism relies on the assumption that the away goals rule did achieve what it set out to do, that the additional value placed on an away goal did make away sides more attacking. But there is no evidence for that at all; in fact, if anything, the data suggests the away goals rule made it harder for away sides to score.

The regulation was introduced to the European Cup in 1967-68, so we have 12 seasons of data from the competition before the away goals rule. In that time, the away side failed to score in 33 per cent of games. In the 12 seasons after the introduction of the law, the away team failed to score in 45 per cent of games. In other words, after the introduction of legislation supposed to encourage the away team to attack, they found it 36 per cent harder to score.

Of course, correlation is not causation; there are other factors at work here. Football did generally become more defensive from the mid-60s onwards. It is possible that without the away goals rule the away team would have failed to score in more than 45 per cent of games. But there are two teams involved in any game. If you incentivise one team to do one thing, you almost certainly incentivise the other to do the opposite. Could it not be that that increase in away teams failing to score is the result of home teams being incentivised to stop them scoring?

Historic...PSG's win over Bayern Munch in April was the last Champions League tie to be settled by away goals

> The problem that the away goals law was intended to challenge, however unsuccessfully it did so, has largely disappeared

If that is the case, and Arsene Wenger, for one, has spoken of that dynamic, it may be that the removal of the law actually makes football less tentative. It is true that a 0-0 draw without the away goals rule becomes a better result for the away side than with it, but equally a 2-2 draw without the rule becomes a better result for the home team.

Besides which, football has changed radically since the law was introduced. Shutting up shop is much harder now. That's in part because of law changes, making a rigorous offside trap far harder to impose and cracking down on intimidatory tackling. But it's also because of technical and tactical changes. Improvements in pitches, balls and boots mean that, at elite level, a good first touch is taken for granted. That

increases the pace of attacks, allows the best sides to practise rapid and sophisticated patterns of play for breaking down massed defences.

And because elite sides tend to dominate at domestic level, very few of them are particularly good at defending – which is one of the reasons the final stages of the Champions League over the past few years have been so dramatic and thrilling. It is theoretically possible that the abolition of the away goals rule will see elite teams radically revise their approaches, but it seems unlikely.

And anyway, the problem that the away goals law was intended to challenge, however unsuccessfully it did so, has largely disappeared. Travel is not so arduous as it was. An away trip in Europe is no longer a trip into the unknown. Conditions have been homogenised, stadiums sanitised. There is no longer the same sense of discomfort and danger. When the away goals rule was introduced to the Cup Winners' Cup in 1965-66, the away team only won 16 per cent of games. Before COVID changed the parameters, that figure had more than doubled. A study in *The Times*, meanwhile, showed that, until 1980, home teams in UEFA competition had an advantage of 1.06 goals per game. By 2000 that had fallen to 0.77. By 2018 it was 0.51.

Or take a recent case study: MLS introduced away goals for its play-offs in 2014. Before the law came in, away teams failed to score in 42.7 per cent of games; afterwards, that figure went up to 43.5 per cent – which is pretty much what you'd expect in the present environment in which defending is difficult: the incentive for away teams to score is balanced by the incentive for home teams not to let them.

Put simply, playing away isn't the handicap it used to be. The away goals rule isn't needed, and it never worked anyway – perhaps even achieved the opposite of what it set out to do. It should have been abolished years ago.

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

No more green... Lazio's away kit from last season will no longer be allowed

1 NO MORE GREEN

Italy's Serie A have taken the unusual step of banning green kits from next season. The reasoning offered by the decision makers is that the kits clash with the pitch, making it harder to watch for the viewers. Colour-blind fans have already argued that the problem is that it clashes between opposing teams, not with the grass. However, an exception will be made for clubs who already have green as their home kit, such as Sassuolo.

2 EXTREME CONDITIONS

Following his departure from Atlanta United, some bizarre stories have emerged about Gabriel Heinze's regime at the MLS club. Team doctors were reportedly concerned when the Argentine limited the amount of water that players could drink during training, while he was also said to have refused to speak directly with his players, instead using intermediaries to send messages. Heinze's highly-demanding training regime even led the MLS Player Association to file a grievance. The former Manchester United defender only won two of his 13 matches in charge before being sacked.

3 OUR PLAYER IS YOUR PLAYER

When Portsmouth found themselves with only ten fit players for the remainder of their pre-season friendly with Bristol City in July, they were ready to see the game out a man down. But instead, the Robins offered one of their youth players, Marlee Francois, to make up the numbers, and the 18-year-old Australian didn't waste the opportunity, scoring a late equaliser against his club to bag a 3-3 draw.

4 NOT SO FRIENDLY

In France, an even more chaotic friendly took place, with Lille team-mates Xeka and Tiago Djalo sent off for fighting each other. The two players clashed just after the half-time whistle was blown, and had to be separated as they raised their fists to each other. The referee promptly red carded both players, forcing the French champions to play the second half with nine men; although their opponents, KV Kortijk, only fielded ten players to help even things up.

5 PEPE THE PENGUIN

While most footballers tend to occupy their time off the pitch with rounds of golf, playing computer games or spending time with family and friends, Lazio goalkeeper Pepe Reina has his own way of switching off from the beautiful game. Dressed up in a giant penguin costume, the former Milan, Napoli, Liverpool, Aston Villa, Villarreal and Barca shot-stopper made a shock appearance on Spain's version of *The Masked Singer*. "Seriously pondering if the next step is Eurovision!" Reina later said on Twitter.

6 ITALIAN INK

A couple of Italy fans have marked their team's Euro 2020 success with some remarkable tattoos. First, an image of captain Giorgio Chiellini's cynical foul on Bukayo Saka was immortalised on a bicep, with the trophy alongside it. Meanwhile, an image of midfielder Nicolo Barella celebrating in his tournament suit with a pair of shades and bottle of beer that went viral on social media has also been captured, alongside the caption: "It's coming Rome."

Inked...fans loved Chiellini's cynical foul

"Feyenoord explicitly distances itself from the deeply hurtful and threatening statements such as the appalling banner directed at Steven Berghuis"

Feyenoord call for an end to the abuse aimed at their ex-captain after his controversial move to Ajax

IN PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

SUMMER 2021 LATEST MAJOR TRANSFERS

Argentina star... Rodrigo De Paul

Returning... Marko Grujic

Milan new boy... Olivier Giroud

Another loan... William Saliba

Qatar bound... Javi Martinez

£50m	**Ben White**	Brighton to Arsenal
£30m	**Rodrigo De Paul**	Udinese to Atletico Madrid
£18m	**Marc Guehi**	Chelsea to Crystal Palace
£17.2m	**Albert Sambi Lokonga**	Anderlecht to Arsenal
£13.5m	**Kristoffer Ajer**	Celtic to Brentford
£12.9m	**Kamaldeen Sulemana**	Nordsjaelland to Rennes
£12m	**Sebastiaan Bornauw**	Cologne to Wolfsburg
£11m	**Lukas Nmecha**	Manchester City to Wolfsburg
£10.5m	**Marko Grujic***	Liverpool to Porto
£10.3m	**Boulaye Dia**	Reims to Villarreal
£10m	**Rui Patricio**	Wolves to Roma
£10m	**Rayan Ait Nouri***	Angers to Wolves
£8.5m	**Frank Onyeka**	Midtjylland to Brentford
£8.5m	**Calvin Stengs**	AZ to Nice
£8.5m	**Mitchel Bakker**	PSG to Bayer Leverkusen
£8m	**Nuno Tavares**	Benfica to Arsenal
£8m	**Michael Olise**	Reading to Crystal Palace
£6.8m	**Jose Sa**	Olympiakos to Wolves
£6.5m	**Taiwo Awoniyi***	Liverpool to Union Berlin
£6.4m	**Sandro Tonali***	Brescia to Milan
£6.4m	**Niklas Dorsch**	Gent to Augsburg
£6m	**Jesper Lindstrom**	Brondby to Eintracht Frankfurt
£5.6m	**Ismail Jakobs**	Cologne to Monaco
£4.5m	**Carl Starfelt**	Rubin Kazan to Celtic
£4.5m	**Kyogo Furuhashi**	Vissel Kobe to Celtic
£4.3m	**Carles Alena***	Barcelona to Getafe
£4m	**Ike Ugbo***	Chelsea to Genk
£3.9m	**Alireza Jahanbakhsh**	Brighton to Feyenoord
£3.8m	**Luan Peres**	Santos to Marseille
£3.5m	**Felipe Anderson**	West Ham United to Lazio
£3.5m	**Pierre Lees-Melou**	Nice to Norwich City
£3.5m	**Steven Berghuis**	Feyenoord to Ajax
£3.5m	**Liel Abada**	Maccabi Petah Tikva to Celtic
£3.4m	**Fode Ballo-Toure**	Monaco to Milan
£3m	**Tanner Tessmann**	FC Dallas to Venezia
£2.6m	**Melvin Bard**	Lyon to Nice
£2.4m	**Marco Silvestri**	Verona to Udinese
£2.2m	**Silvan Widmer**	Basel to Mainz
£1.7m	**Demarai Gray**	Bayer Leverkusen to Everton
£1.7m	**Frederik Ronnow**	Eintracht Frankfurt to Union Berlin
£1.7m	**Fran Garcia***	Real Madrid to Rayo Vallecano
£1.3m	**Mario Gonzalez**	Villarreal to Braga
£1m	**Mathew Ryan**	Brighton to Real Sociedad
£855k	**Olivier Giroud**	Chelsea to Milan

*(*Loan deal made permanent)*

LOANS

Pierluigi Gollini Atalanta to Tottenham Hotspur
Justin Kluivert Roma to Nice
Brahim Diaz Real Madrid to Milan
William Saliba Arsenal to Marseille
Justin Hoogma Hoffenheim to Greuther Furth
Andreaw Gravillon Internazionale to Reims
Adrian Fein Bayern Munich to Greuther Furth
Lucas Perrin Marseille to Strasbourg
Matt Clarke Brighton to West Bromwich Albion
Sebastiano Esposito Internazionale to Basel
Musa Juwara Bologna to Crotone
Adalberto Penaranda Watford to Las Palmas
Kiko Casilla Leeds United to Elche
Omar Alderete Hertha Berlin to Valencia
Tahith Chong Manchester United to Birmingham City
Ruben Vinagre Wolves to Sporting
Manu Garcia Sporting Gijon to Alaves
Yusuf Demir Rapid Vienna to Barcelona
Filip Stevanovic Manchester City to Heerenveen
Darian Males Internazionale to Basel
Pau Lopez Roma to Marseille
Zinho Vanheusden Internazionale to Genoa
Peter Etebo Stoke City to Watford

FREE TRANSFERS

Jon Flanagan Charleroi to HB Koge
Salvatore Sirigu Torino to Genoa
Elseid Hysaj Napoli to Lazio
Marek Suchy Augsburg to Mlada Boleslav
Monchu Barcelona to Granada
Matheus Fernandes Barcelona to Palmeiras
Javi Martinez Bayern Munich to Qatar SC
Asmir Begovic Bournemouth to Everton
Wayne Hennessey Crystal Palace to Burnley
Andros Townsend Crystal Palace to Everton
Joshua King Everton to Watford
Joao Mario Internazionale to Benfica
Pablo Hernandez Leeds United to Castellon
Robin Quaison Mainz to Al Ettifaq
Christian Atsu Newcastle United to Al Raed
Kays Ruiz-Atil PSG to Barcelona
Remi Matthews Sunderland to Crystal Palace
Kevin Gameiro Valencia to Strasbourg
Carlos Bacca Villarreal to Granada
Fabian Balbuena West Ham United to Dynamo Moscow
Andrey Lunyov Zenit to Bayer Leverkusen
Mario Balotelli Monza to Adana Demirspor

"He was a proper, old-fashioned centre-forward who would have prospered in the modern game…To me, he was a blend of Harry Kane, Marco van Basten and Ruud van Nistelrooy rolled into one"

Terry Butcher pays tribute to his former England team-mate Paul Mariner

Appointments, sackings and loans

OUT

EUROPE

ARJEN ROBBEN retired for the second time after an injury-plagued season back at his first club Groningen.

Retiring… Robben

Former England, Liverpool and West Ham United striker **ANDY CARROLL** was released by Newcastle United.

EDGAR DAVIDS was sacked by Portuguese minnows Olhanense after just six months in charge.

Former England youth coach **STEVE COOPER**, who won the Under-17 World Cup in 2017, left his role as Swansea City manager after two seasons in charge.

Departure… Steve Cooper

CONCACAF

Atlanta United sacked manager **GABRIEL HEINZE** after just 13 games in charge of the MLS side.

SOUTH AMERICA

Shortly after firing Colon to the league title in Argentina, midfielder **LUIS "PULGA" RODRIGUEZ** left the club to join Gimnasia La Plata.

Sacked… Gabriel Heinze

OBITUARIES

Coventry legend…George Curtis

George CURTIS
(1939-2021)
A Coventry City legend, having made 543 appearances for the club – a record for an outfield player. Curtis was part of two league-winning sides in the 1960s, but his finest moment came after retiring, when he managed the club to the 1987 FA Cup trophy in his only season as manager. In 2012 he became one of the club's life presidents.

Jimmy GABRIEL
(1940-2021)
The former Scotland midfielder left Dundee in 1960 to join Everton, and was a key player as the Toffees won their first post-war silverware, including the league title in 1963 and FA Cup in 1966. Later played almost 200 league games for Southampton, before ending his career in America with Seattle Sounders and San Jose Earthquakes.

Mick BATES
(1947-2021)
A key member of Don Revie's all-conquering Leeds United team of the late 1960s and early '70s, Bates' finest moment in a white shirt came in the 1971 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup final. He came off the bench to hit the equaliser in a first-leg 2-2 draw with Juventus, and the goal proved decisive as Leeds lifted the trophy on the away goals rule. In total Bates made 191 appearances for the Whites, and also won the 1972 FA Cup and 1973-74 First Division title.

Dave DUNMORE
(1934-2021)
A prolific goalscorer during the 1950s and '60s, for a range of clubs including York City, Tottenham Hotspur, West Ham United and Leyton Orient.

Ernie MOSS
(1949-2021)
In three separate spells at the club, Moss struck a record 192 goals for Chesterfield, while also managing to be prolific for a whole host of other football league clubs, including Peterborough, Mansfield, Port Vale and Doncaster. Sadly, his death is the latest in a long line of former players lost to dementia.

Paul MARINER
(1953-2021)
Made his name at Plymouth Argyle before a decade in the First Division for Ipswich Town and later Arsenal, scoring over 100 goals. Mariner netted in Ipswich's victorious UEFA Cup final in 1981, three years after winning the FA Cup, and also scored 13 goals in 35 games for England, playing at both Euro 1980 and the 1982 World Cup.

Paul Mariner… during his time as Toronto FC manager

DO YOU WANT TO BECOME A PROFESSIONAL SCOUT?

Football Scouting Worldwide are making it easy and accessible for anyone to become a first team football scout

Red Devils stalwart... Manchester United Head of Goalkeeping Scouting Tony Coton was also a goalkeeping coach at Old Trafford between 1997 & 2007

Football Scouting Worldwide, endorsed by industry experts, including Manchester United Head of Goalkeeping Scouting Tony Coton, and founded by experienced professional football scout Steve Simmons, are providing the platform to begin a career as a professional first team scout. The company have also agreed an exciting live scouting experience and networking opportunity with Manchester City where current, previous and new course attendees will have the option to attend a Premier League game at the Etihad Stadium, including access to a private suite and outside box, featuring guest speakers in relation to scouting before and after the game. Hospitality is also included in the private suite with Football Scouting Worldwide providing accommodation to each attendee.

TONY COTON,
Manchester United Head of Goalkeeping Scouting
I've worked with Steve for many years at two clubs and hope to work with him again in the near future. You couldn't be learning from a better man. His attention to detail and knowledge is exceptional and I encourage you to sign up to this course.

LUCAS MILLGATE,
Millwall First Team Recruitment Analyst
We have taken on guys directly upon completion of Football Scouting Worldwide's scouting course who have proven to be valuable members of our scouting team. They have demonstrated a range of knowledge, have applied themselves admirably and continue to develop under the management at Millwall football club.

ADAM MILES,
Former Leicester City First Team Scout
Steve's scouting insight and guidance was the key to my opportunity in working as a first team scout in producing next opposition and player reports for Leicester City in my 20s having never previously worked in the game with no contacts nor professional playing experience. I would recommend this course to any aspiring scout.

ASH PETCH,
FC Twente First Team Video Scout
I came across Football Scouting Worldwide online and, after contacting Steve, I signed up. I can honestly say I have never met such an inspirational mentor and leader. I can't recommend Steve highly enough or thank him enough for his time and efforts in investing in my development. Upon completion and through Steve's contacts, I immediately began working for FC Twente as a first team video scout. Working as a video scout allows me to work from home and flexibly in covering games for them in creating my scouting reports.

JOE WHEELER,
Millwall First Team Scout
I gained priceless insight from **Chris Hughton**, **Steve McClaren**, **Tony Coton**, **Joleon Lescott** and **Steve Walsh** via the live chats that Steve at Football Scouting Worldwide hosts. The course material upon signing up, including scouting templates, sample reports and handbook guides, were very useful. Steve provided quick and extremely useful detail and feedback on my own practical scouting reports whilst also presenting really good opportunities to experience real life scouting; online and live at games. I began working for Millwall as a first team scout straight after the course.

BEN STRANG,
Cambridge United Sporting Director
We were delighted to utilise the services of Football Scouting Worldwide last season. FSW provided us with numerous team assessments from a pool of scouts with a geographical spread, ensuring that we were able to get live viewings of games across the country. They were also happy to help in providing player assessments whenever required and added a greater depth to our scouting capabilities. We look forward to our continued relationship with Steve and the team.

Scouting advice...Steve Walsh has provided course attendees with invaluable insight as to the key information a manager and chief scout want from their scouts via live webinars hosted by FSW

Face to face: Steve Simmons

FOOTBALL SCOUTING WORLDWIDE'S MANAGING DIRECTOR AND PROFESSIONAL SCOUT

Who should sign up to this online scouting course?
Anyone who is looking to become a professional first team football scout. The course replicates how you would scout for a club at first team level with practical scouting assignments and training on the scouting platform used by clubs across the UK and Europe. Course attendees will also have the opportunity to use this on the course. The course can also be taken by anyone anywhere in the world as it's all based online.

What happens when someone signs up for the course?
They will instantly receive everything they need to begin the course via e-mail including professional scouting sample reports, scouting templates and FREE scouting handbooks. They also have the option to begin immediately!

Will course attendees need any prior qualifications or playing experience?
Not at all as everything in relation to first team scouting is covered on the course.

Can the course be taken alongside a full-time job or during studies?
Absolutely. The course has been tailor-made to take alongside a job or studies. It is self-paced and can be completed all in your own time with no deadlines or exams from anywhere in the world.

Do I need to live near a club to work for a club?
Not at all. I am based in Surrey and have worked for Birmingham City, Aston Villa and Sunderland to name a few clubs. Clubs also have scouts based abroad and those who work as video scouts. Video scouts can work from anywhere in the world. For example, we have guys working for FC Twente in the Netherlands who are video scouts that live in the UK.

Who has featured as a guest speaker on the course?
We have had Steve McClaren, Chris Hughton, Joleon Lescott, Manchester United Head of Goalkeeping Scouting Tony Coton and Steve Walsh, who was Leicester City's chief scout when they won the Premier League title in 2015-16. They have all been fantastic in not only giving up their time but key to the development of our course attendees in them gaining the insight as to exactly what information a manager and chief scout want to know when reading a scouting report.

What support is provided on and after the course?
I personally provide full support to all course attendees in mentoring them from start to finish, whilst also providing feedback on scouting reports. I also host the live scouting video chats via Zoom where attendees can also ask any scouting related questions.

What else will I receive after the course?
Signed and date-stamped certification with full support in producing a tailor-made scouting CV as well as a personal letter of recommendation.

What clubs have course attendees scouted for directly after completing the Football Scouting Worldwide course?
Most recently we have placed a number of course attendees at Millwall, Shrewsbury Town, FC Twente and Stockport County.

When did you begin scouting professionally?
I started aged 19 in working as a first team scout for Wycombe Wanderers.

How long have you been working as a professional first team scout?
Fifteen years including ten combined in working for clubs in the Premier League. I spent just under ten years at Aston Villa and all in senior roles as a UK Scout, Next Opposition Scout and European Scouting Manager.

What inspired you to get into football scouting?
Championship Manager, Football Manager as it is now, was the catalyst in knowing that I wanted to become a scout. It consumed my teenage years but genuinely provided an excellent platform in initially learning the key attributes to be looking out for in each position. I knew that I was never going to make it professionally as a player so becoming a scout was the next best thing.

What would you say to anyone interested in working in football or scouting who suffers with their mental health?
I'm introverted, to be honest, and like so many suffer with anxiety and depression, whilst also being diagnosed as bipolar II in January 2019. I see an improvement in this area of the game, but I feel a responsibility to continue to help break the stigma and want to help others who are looking to work in football but worry that their anxiety or depression will hold them back. Going into a club's training ground for recruitment meetings or even when hosting the live chats for example has always made me feel incredibly anxious beforehand, but I think it's only because I don't want to let anyone down.

Do many women work in men's football as a first team scout?
This is an area of the game that I desperately want to help evolve and bring out of the Stone Age! I've been doing this job for 15 years and in the thousands of games I've attended, I've only ever come across two or three female scouts working in the men's game. The industry and clubs are effectively saying women cannot identify talented male players, which has to change.

What advice would you give to anyone looking to become a scout?
Watch as many games as you possibly can across different levels and leagues. Play Football Manager when you can and record games, even if it's just to listen to pundits and analysis. You never stop learning and every time people like Roy Keane, Gary Neville and Alan Shearer, to name a few, open their mouths, I often find myself learning something new or something that will make me look at an aspect of the game, the position, player or tactics differently. My final piece of advice...sign up to the course! I will look forward to personally supporting you from start to finish – and beyond.

"Do the job you love and you'll never work again"

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earth

eye witness

David Whitworth reports

SPAIN

Evergreen Joaquin

As the Real Betis legend prepares for another La Liga season at the age of 40, David Whitworth looks back over his career at the Benito Villamarin stadium

From his upbringing in his native El Puerto de Santa Maria, Joaquin possessed a thirst for football. He lived, breathed and slept the beautiful game from early childhood: football-mad with a dream to reach the top. Born into a family of four brothers and sisters, his life was centred around two Fs: *familia* and *futbol*. It was his uncle, known as "*El Chino*", who noticed his skills and encouraged his talented nephew to focus on honing his footballing skills.

His professional career began in the 1999-2000 season with the academy team at Real Betis. What the club already knew quickly became evident to the wider world – they had a superstar in the making.

Betis were making rapid progress in line with their young starlet, who matured and improved in harmony with his team. Before long, the rough diamond became the crown jewel, propelling him to a regular place in the Spanish national team.

His elegance, dribbling ability and sheer pace as a tricky right-winger drove Betis to a memorable 2004-05 season, sealing a Copa del Rey trophy and Champions League qualification for the first time in their history – the first Andalusian club to achieve the feat.

Leading the line for Betis during that era was Luis Eduardo Schmidt, aka Edu, who spent five seasons at the club.

"I greatly enjoyed his talents on the field," he says of his former team-mate. "Playing with him was a lot of fun. We both achieved a lot of goals and assists for each other. Joaquin is a player who can settle a match with one moment of dribbling magic or one movement of real quality to penetrate the opposition."

With his performances drawing acclaim from his peers, club supporters and La Liga alike, so too did interest begin from overseas. After showcasing his talents in a Champions League group that featured both Liverpool and Chelsea, a queue of clubs lined up for his signature, including the two Premier League sides. In the summer of 2006, he joined Valencia for the first of nine seasons away from the club where he made his name.

After further spells with Malaga and Fiorentina, Joaquin made a hero's return to Betis in 2015. His long-awaited return was confirmed on the final day of the summer transfer window – but it was far from straightforward. Talks between Fiorentina and Betis slowed down to a near standstill; Joaquin even punched a coffee table in dismay, breaking two fingers.

"Over the last few days there was a lot of tension," he explained during his presentation to the media, after the deal had gone through at the eleventh hour. "My agent had his phone switched off and it made me lose my temper. So I punched a table, maybe also a chair, and got two small holes in my hand.

"As I've never punched anything in my life, it really hurt..."

At his unveiling, greeted by 22,000 Betis supporters, he posed with a white cast on his arm to show the emotions he endured to push through a return to his boyhood team.

In this second coming for the Green and Whites, he has played six seasons, racking up over 200 appearances and scoring almost 30 goals. He also helped Betis return to the European scene, featuring prominently in the 2018-19

Time away...Joaquin spent nine years away from Betis at Valencia, Malaga and Fiorentina

Europa League, when an unbeaten group-stage campaign included a famous victory against Milan at the San Siro.

Last season, he again helped fire Betis to Europa League qualification, playing 27 league games with two goals. Although he was often deployed in a super sub role, completing 90 minutes just once, even his short bursts were enough to help his side win points. In January's trip to San Sebastian, Betis were losing 2-0 to Real Sociedad when Joaquin came on in the 77th minute. Less than ten minutes later he'd set up Sergio Canales to drag his side back into the match and then, in stoppage time, struck himself to seal an unlikely 2-2 draw.

How is he still going so strong? "He understands his movements more intelligently nowadays," says Edu. "His sense of positioning on the pitch has notably improved, such is the capability of his football brain. Therefore, he reads the game with more thought through more economical sprints and creating danger in opportune moments.

"His footwork is impressive both technically and aesthetically, but with even more merit given he has matured over time with age and experience."

Two seasons ago, the winger continued to defy his age by scoring eight goals in 34 appearances – one short of his best tally set in 2002-03. He has 37 assists and 57 goals in Betis colours and remarkably scored the first hat-trick of his career at 38 in December 2019 in a 3-2 win over Athletic Club – the oldest player in La Liga history to net a treble.

"A hard worker who doesn't complain about training or working on his game every single day," says Manuel Alcantarilla, club physio since 2012. "Still at his age he is looking to improve. It is no coincidence he is at the top of his game.

"He has an amazing capacity, genetically speaking, to be able to perform at optimum level allied to his determination and drive. He is a transparent person who is deeply cherished."

Joaquin is second on the all-time leaderboard for La Liga appearances. He begins the new season on 579, 43 behind former Spain goalkeeper Andoni Zubizarreta. In July 2020, he replaced Real Madrid legend Raul as the outfield player with the most La Liga games.

More opportunities to add to his tally will arrive. In May, the talismanic captain was rewarded with a one-year deal, just two months ahead of his 40th birthday. Both Betis and Joaquin had no doubts about continuing their love-struck marriage through to 2022, yet there was more than just nostalgic sentiment to the decision: he earned the deal with his performances.

> "There was a lot of tension…so I punched a table, maybe also a chair, and got two small holes in my hand. As I've never punched anything in my life, it really hurt"
>
> Joaquin on his return to Betis in 2015

La Liga veteran...the winger's first league season was 2001-02

Now, Joaquin embarks on his 22nd campaign as a footballer. Thanks to the club finishing in sixth last season, he will compete in the Europa League again, as well as the league and cup. Betis will have to use him economically.

Joaquin keeps himself in tremendous shape, as Betis' nutritionist Giuseppe Ricciardi can attest: "We hear the phrase 'it's genetic', many times about Joaquin, but it goes deeper. It is not only genetics and how he takes care of himself, it is also his positive attitude, his motivation to exceed, to know and listen to his body, to know how to manage himself and his hunger to strive further. But

One more year...Joaquin

we cannot forget one important component: to enjoy!"

Juan Jose Canas, the man who captained Joaquin and Betis to that famous Copa del Rey in 2005 and now works in the club's scouting department, says: "Joaquin is a joyful, happy person. A terrific footballer that has already earned legendary status at Betis with what he has achieved in the game. Yet he is a very humble and kind person who demonstrates his solidarity through his charity work, showing his most personable and sincere character."

Football has not been Joaquin's sole love. His other childhood dream was to be a bullfighter, before realising that his talent with the ball would serve him better. He also has a passion for comedy, and is famed for telling an exhaustive amount of jokes. As the joker-in-the-pack, he thrives on entertaining and actively comments his tales on social media to his three million followers.

While Joaquin still has one eye on more records, the other is on his future beyond football. He has mentioned on many occasions he would love to go into show business when he does finally hang up his boots. He has presented a cooking programme, while other television appearances have included successfully hypnotising a chicken live on TV, and driving the Betis team bus through an assault course; all part of the weird but wonderful world of Joaquin. When football loses a star; showbiz will gain one.

With his post-football career already lined up, this season is likely to be his last, and his Betis team-mates will try their best to ensure that he is given a fitting send-off. Then again, if they continue to challenge in the top half of La Liga, and if Zubizarreta's appearance record moves into his sights, maybe he'll be tempted by one more year. Whatever happens, he will remain evergreen in every sense.

Hero's return... fans welcomed Joaquin back with open arms in 2015

Credit: Instagram @joaquinarte

eye witness

Steve Menary reports

CYPRUS

PAEEK: a club in exile

PAEEK...the club play in black and white to mark their exile

When Turkish troops annexed the top half of Cyprus in 1974, an estimated 6,000 people died and thousands of Greek Cypriot refugees fled to the south of the Mediterranean island.

Some sports clubs that were a big part of people's lives before the war simply disappeared but Podosfairiki Athlitiki Enosi Eparxeias Kerynias – better known as PAEEK – survived.

Some players from the club, which was founded in the harbour town of Kyrenia in 1953, were taken prisoner but a small group of Kyrenians, led by then-mayor Stelios Katsellis, fought to keep the club alive. For years, PAEEK were homeless, constantly borrowing fields or stadiums, before eventually leasing government-owned land in the Strovolos suburb of Nicosia, some 22 miles inland, to build a stadium.

"Our club survived to give a sense of existence and a glimpse of hope to the people of Kyrenia," says former president Andreas Stavrides. "We couldn't afford to lose the younger generations, so we developed the academy structure. The youngsters had a roof over their heads to practise in a safe environment and stay away from bad influences.

"They were constantly reminded about their roots. The desire to seek justice was not allowed to diminish."

The club developed players such as international midfielder Giorgos Economides, but as mainstays of the lower leagues for four decades, PAEEK were known locally as the Cinderella of Cypriot football – but not anymore. In 2021-22, for the first time, PAEEK will play in the Cypriot First Division.

Needing a draw to win promotion in their final game, PAEEK were losing 2-1 at home to Othellos, until Michalis Frangos equalised in the 95th minute.

"It was incredible, unbelievable and proves in sport that you can do anything," says club president, Cleanthis Georgiades. "We are a small club run by only two or three people and it was not with the idea of being professionals. It was mainly amateur.

"We have been playing in Strovolos but the stadium is not qualified for the first division. It has to be upgraded and there was not time so we will play at the Makario Stadium – so we are refugees again."

Georgiades knows all about being a refugee: his father was a member of parliament for Kyrenia and his mother was mayor. Then in 1974 – aged just five – he had to flee advancing Turkish paratroopers. PAEEK has since become a touchstone for a life in Kyrenia that many Greek Cypriots were forced to leave behind

PAEEK are not the only exiled club. Anorthosis from Famagusta play in Larnaca and have won 13 titles and, in 2008-09, became the first Cypriot

Dramatic...PAEEK celebrating their last-gasp promotion-winning goal

club to reach the Champions League group stage. Anorthosis are a major force in Cypriot football, but the cultural status of PAEEK easily outstripped their achievements on the field.

PAEEK used to play in yellow and black but changed to black and white to mark their exile. They plan to revert to their old strip when the club return to Kyrenia.

"And next year in Kyrenia" is a parting phrase amongst supporters. Even PAEEK's 2,000 capacity home in Strovolos is known as the Return to Kyrenia Stadium, but going back any time soon seems unlikely.

Turkey's annexation of Northern Cyprus has dogged the island for half a century and was exacerbated in 1983 by a unilateral declaration of independence, which remains recognised only by the Turkish regime in Ankara. Recep Erdogan's government has become more bullish about Northern Cyprus and in November Turkey's president visited the beaches in the former resort town of Varosha.

Like Famagusta, Varosha is a ghost town that was fenced off by barbed wire since the invasion and the opening of beaches stirred up media attention and tension in Greek Cyprus.

"And next year in Kyrenia"...PAEEK fans cheer on their team

Club president...Cleanthis Georgiades (R) collects the league trophy

Georgiades is aware PAEEK's promotion will also raise awareness and hopes to attract exiled Kyrenians to boost attendances. He adds: "The club is not just football. It's a lot of things and we represent the occupied side and the need to solve the political problem.

"For the first year at the Makarios, I would expect more than 1,000 people as all these guys that are everywhere in the south will have a reason to come to the stadium. But I don't think anyone will come from Kyrenia as since the war they have their own team."

Dogan Turk Birligi were founded in Limassol in Greek Cyprus, but now play at the Mete Adanir Stadium in Kyrenia, known as Girne to Turkish Cypriots. DTB have won seven league titles and two cups in the KTFF's league, which is restricted by lack of international recognition. In contrast, exciting new opportunities have begun to open up for PAEEK since Georgiades returned two years ago.

A qualified lawyer, Georgiades had been working for the Cyprus Sports Organisation but came back to PAEEK after the club slumped into the third division in 2018-19. He explains: "For three years I was out of the club as I didn't have time but the people who were there did not give it the proper attention. So I came back and said, 'we will have a two-year plan' and it has worked perfectly."

Under Akis Kamenos, the club won the third division, before Georgiades recruited former national Under-17 coach Makis Sergides and PAEEK won successive promotions – and titles – by edging out the more fancied Aris Limassol on goal difference after a major squad overhaul.

Dutch midfielder Bert Esselink joined from De Graafschap in the Netherlands and played 34 games. He says: "The club wanted to go for promotion and communicated this target directly when I spoke with them. Maybe it was unrealistic after promotion from Division Three but PAEEK changed almost everything in the club with all new players, which changed the situation.

Cyprus has a higher proportion of foreign players than any league in Europe and PAEEK had a dozen foreigners in 2020-21 including Portuguese goalkeeper Rafael Alves and experienced Greek winger Frangos. With Esselink enjoying his time in Cyprus, former team-mate Matthijs van Nispen followed from De Graafschap last winter.

"PAEEK made me a good offer, so I was like: 'Why not? Let's go for the adventure and great experience', and it ended in a championship and an amazing end of the season," says Van Nispen. "I think the team wasn't an ordinary team like any other team. We became a family within the staff and all the people of the club included. I think we all fight for the city of Kyrenia.

"There's a strong feeling of fighting for something extraordinary. They even bring this kind of feeling to the foreigners. It feels like a small town or small community within a big city that represents Kyrenia to make an impossible dream become reality."

The foreigners combined well with young Cypriot players such as midfielder Anastasios Antoniou, U21 international forward Michalis Christodoulou and U17 international Georgiou Panagiotis.

PAEEK won a second promotion with an attacking 4-3-3 style that brought an average of two goals per game and made the team the league's top scorers.

> "The club is not just football...we represent the occupied side and the need to solve the political problem"
>
> **Club president Cleanthis Georgiades**

Photos credit: Savvides Press

Against big first division sides with regular experience in UEFA competition, the style will be more measured.

"We definitely have to defend more but I think we're capable of playing the same style even in division one," says Van Nispen. "The main target is to avoid relegation. It should be this because I think we have less money than other clubs, so we have to be creative.

"But if we stay together as we did last season, and fight for each other, I think we can reach the stars. The family feeling and the dream to fight for the whole community is stronger than ever."

With a budget unlikely to exceed €400,000, PAEEK will do well to survive, particularly as the first division

Promotion...PAEEK players celebrate with the trophy

only has 12 teams in 2021-22. But Georgiades is thinking longer term.

He explains: "The problem this year is that our budget is less than half of the next smallest club, but we have shown that we can succeed with difficulties.

"We want to create a team that can stay in the first division and if we only stay one year then we will be back because the following season there will be 14 teams. So, if we are in the second division again, we can be one of the strongest teams and come straight up again."

Georgiades plans to bring in more foreign players and all of PAEEK's squad are going full-time. He adds: "Last year, some were part-time but that's not possible and this year everyone has to be full-time. Our coach worked in a bank, but he dared to go full-time. It's a risk you have to take if you want to play professionally and follow your dreams. In division one, you cannot be part-time."

These are all big changes at a club that had been treading water for decades, content in their role as a cultural lodestar for exiled Kyrenians and other Greek Cypriots that lost their homes due to the invasion.

PAEEK was the last club of Spyros Neofitides, the president of the Cypriot players union before he retired. "They are honest and very nice people," recalls Neofitides.

Georgiades does not want to lose that reputation but also wants something bigger for PAEEK. If he succeeds, PAEEK's cultural status is likely to grow too.

Coach...Makis Sergides (L) is congratulated on achieveing promotion

eye witness

Ryan Baldi reports

GHANA & DENMARK

Right to Dream

More than 3,500 miles and two decades separate where Tom Vernon stands, in his office overlooking the pitch of FC Nordsjaelland's 10,000-capacity home stadium, and where the idea for his innovative, trend-bucking Right to Dream Academy was conceived.

"Within 20 minutes of getting out of the airport in Accra in 1999," he says of the moment the notion of creating a football academy to provide hope and opportunity for the young people of Ghana occurred to him. "The boys were so talented but also so magnetic in their personalities and love for life and love for the game. It was a combination of a desire to work with kids like that and then the obvious need for pathways and

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structure and opportunities that almost exclusively doesn't exist in African football."

Fast-forward to the present day, Right to Dream now owns Danish Superliga club Nordsjaelland, has residential boys' and girls' academies in Ghana and Denmark, and will soon be opening another in Egypt, as well as a professional women's team based in Cairo. The RTD programme has so far produced more than 60 professional footballers – including Denmark and Sampdoria star Mikkel Damsgaard, and Mohammed Kudus, who joined Ajax in 2019 for €9 million – while also generating scholarships worth a total of around $40 million to US universities for attendees who weren't able to pursue a career in the game.

All of this represents an incredible journey from the humblest of beginnings. The first Right to Dream trials were attended by 100 local boys. Vernon, a coach and former Africa scout for Manchester United, filled his house with bunk beds and desks for the boys to stay and study with him and his wife. "Three of them ended up playing for Ghana," he says of that initial intake, "five became pros in Europe and six graduated from Division One universities in America on a full scholarship."

Vernon admits that, for much of Right to Dream's existence, he's had to "hustle" to finance it. He began a football tourism business, funnelling all the profits into the academy, and sought support and partnerships with various clubs. A purpose-built, $2.5m base was opened in 2010, and Vernon believes their eight-pitch site with fully equipped classrooms represents the best academy facility in sub-Saharan Africa. A girls' programme – the first and only full-time, residential female youth academy on the continent – was founded in 2013.

From 100 attendees at the first trials in 1999, between Ghana, Ivory Coast and Egypt, some 40,000 youngsters will try out for a place in a Right to Dream academy this year. Only 40 will be selected.

Founder...Tom Vernon at Nordsjaelland's Right To Dream Park stadium

"We [first] did it on a community level and produced those results; now we're admitting kids who will play in the Champions League or attend Stanford [University]," Vernon says. "The number of kids who earn a living through football or gain an education through football is so high, and we're not even scratching the surface in our numbers."

Right to Dream's philosophy is increasingly becoming recognised as an antidote to some of the murkier practices of elite youth football in Europe. Every player taken into the programme at ten years old is guaranteed a six-year scholarship. And from the outset, building character and prioritising education takes precedent over football development.

"That's what we're most proud of with Right to Dream," says Vernon. "Yes, there are some amazing footballers, but there are kids who love football getting to build a life around football. We will not ask you to leave based on your football performance, which, in my opinion, is how every football academy should be mandated to behave."

Psychologist Pippa Grange, who

Star product...Denmark hero Mikkel Damsgaard began his career in the Right to Dream academy

Successful... Nordsjaelland's women's team

worked with the England squad at the 2018 World Cup, has been installed as Right to Dream's "head of culture", and the likes of Marcus Rashford, Juan Mata and LeBron James are highlighted as role models for the students. The examples of altruistic athletes are cited in an effort to inspire the youngsters to "find their purpose" and seek fulfilment beyond the confines of the football pitch.

"The driving motivation behind that is happiness," Vernon explains. "What we see the life philosophy to be is you need to identify and live your purpose. What we want all of our students and our staff coming through our process to do is identify things that are more important to them."

"It is a project that goes beyond playing games," Nordsjaelland's Under-19s coach Kasper Kurland told *Sky Sports*. "The more the players are engaged outside the pitch then the better players they will become. If it is only football each day then we are missing something."

"I'm interested in art, so I don't really spend all my time on football," added Ghanaian midfielder Abu Francis.

As Right to Dream grew and began to produce high-quality players at an impressive rate, it was determined the natural next step for the programme was to acquire a professional club. They completed the purchase of Danish top-flight side Nordsjaelland in December 2019, inverting the usual dynamic in which an academy is subservient to a senior club side.

Vernon's motivation for having Right to Dream own the club, which is based 20 minutes north of Copenhagen, was born of a desire to prove to the wider world the viability of their model and to offer a pathway to RTD's best African talent. He was realistic, also, in recognising how an affiliated professional European club would provide a further revenue stream through the realisation of transfer fees.

"We believe our academy concept is a universal concept," he says. "What we wanted to say was that this was a concept that was born in Africa, born of African values, which we think has a global relevance. That's why we take tremendous satisfaction seeing our Danish kids go to Ghana when they're 12 years old, living in the academy, understanding the richness of Ghanaian culture and what it has to teach them in their lives, and then a few years later seeing it manifested in a kid like Mikkel Damsgaard tearing it up in the Euros, who went through that whole process.

"We wanted to create pathways for our kids – whether they be from Ghana, Egypt or Denmark – to realise their potential. And from a practical perspective, we know that we won't change the transfer system and we know we have to pay for what we do, so we wanted to climb the food chain of the transfer system. We thought: 'Why not, within the system, realise more of that revenue for us to do what we want to do and to sustain our own organisation.'"

The RTD programme has so far produced more than 60 professional footballers – including Denmark and Sampdoria star Mikkel Damsgaard

In addition to the money-generating sales of the likes of Damsgaard and Kudus, the Nordsjaelland men's senior team – for whom retired Premier League stars Michael Essien and Johan Djourou are coaches – finished fifth in the Danish Superliga last season while setting records for the youthfulness of their squad. In October 2020, the CIES Football Observatory ranked Nordsjaelland's line-up as the youngest among the world's top 67 divisions. And in April 2021, FCN set an all-time domestic record by fielding a side with an average age of just 20 years and 20 days – 13 of the 16 players in that matchday squad were graduates of Right to Dream academies in either Denmark or Ghana.

Nordsjaelland's women's team have been more successful still, earning four consecutive promotions.

In early 2021, The Mansour Group, an Egyptian conglomerate owned by Mohamed Mansour, the seventh-richest person in Africa, invested $120 million for a controlling stake in Right to Dream (Vernon remains CEO and a significant shareholder). The academy is a not-for-dividend enterprise, but this injection of funds means the days of Vernon having to "hustle" to sustain the project are in the past, and he can look ahead and plan to expand into new territories. That begins with the imminent introduction of an academy in Cairo.

"We're recruiting in Egypt at the moment," Vernon says. "From Ghana's 25 million population, you have 350 players playing abroad. Egypt is 105 million and you have 35 players playing abroad.

"Pep Guardiola and European tactical development in football has meant players from developing nations can't adapt to top-level football any more in a way that, when it was less tactical, players used to be able to. It's now vital that players get a football education from, at the latest, 13 if they're going to cope in a tactical game in Europe. For us to ensure that world-class football education does exist in countries like Egypt is super exciting, because the potential there is mind-blowing."

There are indeed exciting times ahead for Right to Dream. Wherever they next set up shop once their Cairo academy is established, Vernon insists that creating opportunities for football's forgotten youth will remain the core mission.

"We think that what we stand for is maybe being lost sight of in the game," he says. "We can be a living example of one of the things football could and probably should be about.

"The large revenues we believe we can generate in the next ten or 20 years can be ploughed back into the creation of opportunities for the kids who were excluded from achieving their dreams."

Ghana...pupils at the Right to Dream academy in Ghana

eyewitness

Josh Butler reports

NORWAY

Arctic FC

One of the last places you'd expect to find a professional football club is 200 miles inside the Arctic Circle, where the snow is enduring and the winter nights interminable. Yet if you journey to the far northern reaches of Norway, to the vast and sparsely inhabited county of Troms and Finnmark, you will find one of the last bulwarks of civilisation against which the harsh and unremitting wilderness encroaches.

On the island of Tromsoya is the settlement of Tromso, a small town of 70,000 people, home to the world's northernmost professional football club: Tromso Idrettslag or TIL, for short.

Since their inception in September 1920, they are a club that have long been accustomed to doing things differently. In a country marked by the stark divide between its southern and northern reaches, Tromso have stitched something of a unique identity amidst the patchwork fabric of Norwegian football – and, increasingly, beyond.

"We are unique, and yet still the same," says club CEO Oyvind Alapnes with a wry smile. He has become something of a minor celebrity in Norway of late, thanks to the club becoming the first team to throw their unequivocal support behind the burgeoning movement to boycott the Qatar World Cup over allegations of slavery and sportswashing.

Tromso, though, are used to being at the vanguard of progress, which has typically been dictated by the challenging surrounds in which the club has operated for over a century. Situated as they are inside the Arctic Circle, the severe weather conditions have led Tromso to approach the game a little differently than the other clubs in Norway, particularly those in the south where the climate is more favourable.

During winter in the far north, the average daily temperature plummets to –3.5°C, while heavy snow is commonplace between September and March.

"We get a lot of snow during the winter here," Alapnes explains. "The snow record is from April 30, 1997. We had two-and-a-half metres. That's the dimensions of how much snow we have."

It is hardly a climate conducive to playing football, let alone at an elite level, and yet Tromso have adapted to their uncompromising surroundings, having spent 32 of the last 34 campaigns in the Norwegian top division. Every year, a dedicated grounds team endeavour to get the pitch ready for the opening round of Eliteserien, which in a typical season, would begin in late March – when winter still has much of Northern Norway in its frigid grasp.

In the past, before the installation of an artificial surface at the Alfheim Stadion in 2006, Tromso laboured through the domestic season on a turf pitch that would often resemble a quagmire by the onset of the snows in September. This drew frequent criticism from other clubs around Norway, whose own pitches fared much better in the warmer south. It was a challenge Alapnes remembers with some mirth.

Winter wonderland... Tromso's picturesque Alfheim Stadion

Snowy conditions... pitch maintenance at the Alfheim

"I remember just a few years ago, I think it was the second last week in May, and Brann in Bergen were playing at home, and they had to stop the match three times because it was so hot and the players needed to drink. Then, the next game Brann were playing was against us here in Tromso, and we had to stop the game because we had to remove snow from the pitch. Quite a week for Brann."

These torrid conditions have forced the club to innovate over the years, and they were the first club in Norway to move their training facilities entirely indoors during their first stint in the top flight in 1986. It was a move that precipitated a flurry of applications from other clubs to play Tromso in their new indoor training arena.

As such, though you would think the players and staff are accustomed to playing in the driving snow, because

the club has long trained indoors out of sheer necessity, there are actually more clubs used to adverse weather conditions than Tromso.

Alapnes elaborated, "There is a saying in Norway: bad weather conditions and Tromso will win. But actually the real thing is that since we have had really good indoor facilities most other clubs are more used to playing in bad weather conditions than we are! I think the biggest challenge is that it is colder up here."

With the cold, of course, comes the long dark, and while this is merely a way of life for native residents, it is a difficult phenomenon to get used to for those who have come from further afield.

When the sun goes down in late November, it does not reappear again until January. It is called "The Polar Night" and it is perhaps the most challenging factor about living in Tromso. Such an isolated location can make it hard to attract players, but Alapnes insists that it is a diminishing issue these days.

"We get players from all over the world, not just Norway or Scandinavia. From Africa, for example. And for them it is a big change. In Norway, Tromso is well-known for all these reasons. Everyone knows what it is like coming here. But when you don't see the sun from November to January it can be a challenge for some people. Even for a few of those who live here!"

Tromso IL...the world's northernmost professional football club

Club CEO... Oyvind Alapnes

This apocalyptic cold and fathomless dark mean that Tromso, along with most clubs in Norway, abandon the homeland during the winter and move their training bases to sunnier climes for part of their pre-season preparations.

"The Norwegian FA and the league itself owns areas in Spain where we always go for maybe two or three weeks during the winter and play against clubs from other countries who have a pre-season camp there."

Hardly the most affluent of clubs, it might seem like a vast and laborious undertaking to move their operations across the entire length of Europe, but for Tromso, it is simply just another idiosyncrasy that has come to define them. They reside a little over 330 miles from their nearest top-division neighbours, Bodo/Glimt, another small provincial club that has long striven against the hegemony of southern Norway's power block, and are thus accustomed to having to travel enormous distances.

"It is probably the biggest challenge," Alapnes admits. "Bigger even than the weather, which we are used to here in Tromso. Bodo is a 45-minute flight, while Rosenborg [based in Trondheim], the next team down, is a two-hour flight."

Not only does this pose a logistical headache – across a typical Eliteserien campaign the club travels in excess of 30,000 miles – it poses a financial burden, too. Although flight travel has been a part of the club's annual budget since the 1980s, financing a top-level team from such a small town is strenuous.

"There are not that many big companies [in Tromso] that can support a professional football club. So the fight of having enough money is a big part of my job. In Norway, we cannot work with betting companies, so it is a challenge to make the money go around."

In an effort to attract the much-needed sponsorship of some of these more lucrative firms, Alapnes has, in another example of the club's constant need for innovation, shifted Tromso's focus off the pitch towards the concept of Arctic sustainability.

"The club has been focusing too much on what's happening on the field and less on what's happening around. It's not easy for a CEO of a company to say that they're going to spend money on professional football; it must be a better story for them to tell their employees. That's why we are focusing very much now on sustainability and how we can be a key player in the Arctic sustainability work. And you see already now that a lot of companies want to co-operate with us there because then that's a better story for them."

Manchester United starlet...Isak Hansen-Aaroen

Like their involvement in the Qatar boycott movement, Tromso are unafraid to get political, in a sense. "We see where politicians fail," Alapnes says. "But we as a club reach the public with another voice that people are actually listening to. When we say that we have to make a change when it comes to sustainability, people want to engage."

There are signs it is working, too. For Alapnes and Tromso, the future lies in sustainability. Increasingly, they are breaking free of the fetters of yesteryear, where previous boards spent exuberant sums on ageing stars in an attempt to halt the practically annual descent into a relegation scrap.

"When I was recruiting, I have said the club needs to work with a longer perspective to actually have a chance. You also have to accept we're building a foundation and the results on the field maybe go up or down. Now, we are looking for younger players that can go in and play at the highest level, then we can actually sell later."

Similarly, Tromso have made use of the exceptional geographic position they find themselves in. The county within which they reside, Troms and Finnmark, is nearly twice the size of Denmark, yet contains a solitary elite football club. The population here is sparse – a mere 3.2 per kilometre squared – and in an increasingly connected global scouting network, TIL are no longer the only club that mines these isolated veins of talent. With the transfer of Isak Hansen-Aaroen to Manchester United only last year, it is evident that this far corner of Norway is no longer simply the domain of Tromso IL.

Back in Eliteserien after a season of absence, perhaps Tromso can replicate the success enjoyed by their neighbours Bodo/Glimt, who became the first club from Northern Norway to secure the league title at the end of 2020. "What we saw from Bodo inspires us that small clubs can have this kind of success."

Not that Alapnes has any designs on copying Glimt's blueprint. Whatever success in the coming years looks like for Tromso, they will achieve it on their own terms, in their own way. After all, they are the world's northernmost professional football club, but, it has to be said, "the world's northernmost league champions" does have a rather enjoyable ring to it.

During winter in the far north, the average daily temperature plummets to -3.5°C

Polar night...Tromso spends months in total darkness

SEASON PREVIEW

2021-22

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City will take some beating - with or without Kane

PLAYERS TO WATCH

DELE ALLI
(Tottenham Hotspur)
One of Nuno Espirito Santo's top priorities at Spurs will be attempting to get the best out of Dele, who completed 90 league minutes just once last season. With Harry Kane's uncertain future, Tottenham need him to deliver again.

EMILIANO BUENDIA
(Aston Villa)
By far the best player in the Championship for Norwich City last season, scoring 15 goals and assisting 16, the Argentina international was heavily linked with Arsenal before joining Aston Villa. Potentially a replacement for in-demand Jack Grealish.

TOMAS SOUCEK
(West Ham United)
Set enormously high standards last season by playing every minute and scoring ten goals as West Ham finished in sixth. A repeat performance would be handy, particularly with the Hammers embarking on a European campaign.

EMMANUEL DENNIS
(Watford)
A precocious talent with a questionable attitude, Nigerian Dennis is sure to be explosive for the Hornets whether he is a success or not. A £3.5m buy from Club Brugge, for whom he once scored a Champions League brace at the Bernabeu.

CURTIS JONES
(Liverpool)
Part of Liverpool's reasoning for allowing Gini Wijnaldum to walk away from the club for free is the rise of Jones, who turns 21 in January. Has shown glimpses of his considerable talent – now is his time to become a first-team regular.

Team to beat... Manchester City are favourites to retain their title

With the new Premier League season almost upon us, transfer questions hang over most of the major title contenders. Will Manchester City succeed in their pursuits of Harry Kane and Jack Grealish? Can Chelsea persuade Borussia Dortmund to sell Erling Haaland, and if so who will leave to fund it? Manchester United are hoping to add defenders Raphael Varane and Kieran Trippier to their squad, in addition to Jadon Sancho – but will those deals make them contenders again? And what about Liverpool, where the uncertainty over Jordan Henderson's future threatens to disrupt the spirit at Anfield?

In truth, regardless of how all of those questions are answered over the coming weeks, Manchester City remain strong favourites to retain their title. All the ingredients that made them such worthy champions last season remain in place: the outstanding defensive partnership of John Stones and Ruben Dias; the midfield excellence of Ilkay Gundogan and, of course, the tactical genius of Pep Guardiola. The Catalan coach's use of a striker-less formation means that the departure of Sergio Aguero is not a huge loss, even if a deal for Kane can not be reached.

Wanted man... will Kane join City this summer?

> Manchester City remain strong favourites to retain their title. All the ingredients that made them such worthy champions last season remain in place

In addition, more is expected from several of City's big-hitters, too. Kevin De Bruyne only started 23 league games last season due to injury, but when fit remains the best player in the league. Raheem Sterling rediscovered his best form at Euro 2020 after a stuttering campaign, while another exciting season surely beckons for their two 21-year-olds, Phil Foden and Ferran Torres. New signings and transfer gossip may get fans excited, but the current cast of City stars are already irresistible.

Yet it would be naive in the extreme to ignore the evidence of City's last competitive fixture, when Thomas Tuchel's Chelsea beat them 1-0 in the Champions League final. The Blues' impressive end to the season, and status as European champions, makes them the most likely usurpers of the crown.

Unlike last summer, when they spent in excess of £200 million, this transfer window has been far quieter for Chelsea. But like City, they already boast a wealth of exciting options, many of whom will improve again. Chief among them is Kai Havertz, the match-winner in Porto and a player

BILLY GILMOUR
(Norwich City)
The 20-year-old has already impressed in both Scotland and Chelsea's first teams, and represents a good piece of business for the Canaries, even on loan. Thomas Tuchel will be certainly keeping a close eye on his progress.

DEMARAI GRAY
(Everton)
The ex-England Under-21 international was a priority for new Toffees boss Rafael Benitez, with the Spaniard aiming to give Dominic Calvert-Lewin pacy support from the wings. Now aged 25, it is time for Gray to deliver on his potential.

JESSE LINGARD
(Manchester United)
Ole Gunnar Solskjaer insists that Lingard is part of his plans following a successful loan at West Ham United. A reprisal of the false nine role that he was used in by David Moyes could be a handy addition to Ole's attacking options.

MICHAEL OLISE
(Crystal Palace)
Another shrewd second-tier purchase for Palace, after they struck gold with Eberechi Eze from Queens Park Rangers last summer. Olise is a gifted playmaker with a classy left foot and, at the age of 19, has enormous potential.

BEN WHITE
(Arsenal)
This time last year, we asked if the centre-back could handle the step up to the Premier League following a successful loan at Leeds. The answer was an emphatic yes, as demonstrated by his £50m move to Arsenal and Euro 2020 call-up.

who is ready to become Chelsea's main man after finding his feet in England. A new striker would be helpful (the Blues were only the eighth-highest scorers in the league last season), though it is not unthinkable that Timo Werner finds a more clinical edge in his second season.

Liverpool did remarkably well to scrape into the top four after a disastrous middle of the season. They suffered badly in Virgil van Dijk's absence – a problem compounded by injuries to their other senior centre-backs Joe Gomez and Joel Matip – and will hope that the Dutchman's return to fitness and the £36m signing of Ibrahima Konate will put them back on the right track.

FA Cup winners... Brendan Rodgers has built a highly impressive squad at Leicester City

> [Leicester City's] is a squad built for title challenging, competing in the Europa League, and attempting to retain the FA Cup

The return of the Anfield crowd will put a spring in their step too, but Jurgen Klopp can't simply expect their title-wining form to automatically return. Georginio Wijnaldum, a key cog in their midfield, has left, while captain Henderson's contract situation is even more alarming. With the fabled front three all approaching their 30th birthdays as well, the top end of the Reds' team will need to be recalibrated in order to challenge again. How Klopp manages that transition will be among his greatest tests as a manager.

Meanwhile, their old rivals Manchester United will expect to challenge for the title as well, especially if they are successful in adding further talent. Yet with big spending comes big pressure, and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer will be wary of the experience of Frank Lampard, who was replaced at Chelsea after failing to get the best out of last summer's expensive new recruits. Defeat in the Europa League final extended Solskjaer's wait for a major trophy at Old Trafford, and prompted the same old doubts and question marks about his inability to break down stubborn defences. Failing to do so with Sancho in the line-up will not be forgiven.

One team whose fate won't be determined by late transfer dealings will be Leicester City, who acted quicker than anyone to seal their primary targets. Patson Daka, Boubakary Soumare and Ryan Bertrand have all arrived at the KP Stadium, where Brendan Rodgers is becoming spoilt for choice with the number of options at his disposal.

For the second year in a row, Champions League football eluded the Foxes after they had been in the top four for the majority of the season, but clearly they are determined to make up for those disappointments: this is a squad built for title challenging, competing in the Europa League, and attempting to retain the FA Cup.

The potential exit of James Maddison would concern Leicester supporters, with the playmaker linked with a big move to Arsenal. The Gunners' transfer business has already been encouraging, recruiting talented youngsters Ben White (Brighton) and Albert Sambi Lokonga (Anderlecht), while Emile Smith Rowe, Gabriel Martinelli and Bukayo Saka will all improve again. The Gunners' fortunes will surely change one day soon, but will it be this season?

Young Gunners... can Arsenal re-join the top four?

Elsewhere, a number of managerial changes will all provoke their own intriguing sub-plots. Will Rafael Benitez win over his doubters at Everton? Is Nuno Espirito Santo the right choice for Tottenham Hotspur? And what of his successor at Wolves, Bruno Lage? Patrick Vieira's return to the Premier League as Roy Hodgson's replacement at Crystal Palace will be fascinating too, especially after adding a handful of promising young signings to his squad – namely Michael Olise and Marc Guehi.

With David Moyes, Marcelo Bielsa and Dean Smith also looking to build on impressive over-achievements last term with West Ham United, Leeds United and Aston Villa, respectively, there is plenty to be excited about in this new season.

Jamie Evans

PROMOTED TEAMS

NORWICH CITY
The Canaries were rewarded for keeping faith with manager Daniel Farke following their relegation in 2020, as the German took them straight back up as runaway league leaders. Having invested more heavily this time around, the board may be less forgiving if he again fails to guide them to safety.

WATFORD
Like Norwich, Watford came back up at the first time of asking, but unlike Norwich, with a different manager. Xisco was appointed in December, shortly after winning the Georgian league title with Dinamo Tbilisi, and won 18 out of 26 games to seal second place.

BRENTFORD
Led by outstanding striker Ivan Toney, who scored a record 31 Championship goals, the Bees shrugged off the disappointment of defeat in the 2020 play-off final and the sale of star forwards Ollie Watkins (Aston Villa) and Said Benrahma (West Ham) to seal promotion, beating Swansea City 2-0 at Wembley.

Brentford a breath of fresh air

Thomas Frank...the Brentford manager celebrates with his players after their Wembley victory

The 50th team to play in the Premier League are, in many ways, a little bit different.

Increasingly often, newly promoted sides are yo-yo clubs: teams that have accumulated funds from the Premier League's TV riches and parachute payments, then used that financial advantage in the Championship to secure a swift return.

Last season, the two automatic promotion spots were claimed by two relegated teams, while the other, Bournemouth, almost joined them via the play-offs. This season, Fulham, Sheffield United and West Bromwich Albion are among the favourites to bounce back up. To break the mould, clubs have to do things differently, and that is exactly what Brentford have done.

For the majority of their 131-year history, the Bees drifted between the third and fourth tiers, last reaching the top flight in the mid-1940s. With Chelsea, Fulham and Queens Park Rangers all within a five-mile radius, they were often the forgotten team of West London.

Not anymore. Under their ambitious owner, Matthew Benham, and co-directors of football, Rasmus Ankersen and Phil Giles, the club is unrecognisable, and not just since their move to the Brentford Community Stadium in 2020. A life-long fan, Benham made his millions in the gambling industry, and in his nine years in charge has slowly tipped the odds in Brentford's favour.

In 2016, Brentford's academy was closed. The system, Benham felt, offered little reward to clubs like his: even if they did manage to attract and hold onto a talented young player, there was nothing to prevent them leaving for "peanuts" further down the line. The case of Ian Poveda – poached by Manchester City for just £30,000 – was the final straw, and Brentford's B team has been in operation ever since.

Unlike other club's reserve or development squads, the B team do not take part in a league structure, instead choosing their own fixture list. Unrestricted in their opponents, they're free to take on a whole variety of challenges, from Barnet in the Middlesex Senior Cup to Borussia Dortmund's Under-23s. They have created an environment to nurture and challenges their young players in a way that the U23s leagues fail to do.

Recruitment has been the other key ingredient to Brentford's rise. A sophisticated use of data and scouting has allowed them to sign the likes of Ollie Watkins, Said Benrahma, Neal Maupay, Chris Mepham, Ezri Konsa, Andre Gray, Scott Hogan and James Tarkowski, then sell them on for fees in excess of £100 million; and that list is by no means exhaustive.

> For the majority of their 131-year history, the Bees drifted between the third and fourth tiers…they were often the forgotten team of West London

Perhaps even more impressive is the way that each of those outgoings have been replaced. After arriving last summer, Ivan Toney provided the firepower they needed to get promoted, comfortably replacing the goals of Watkins and Benrahma, with the best part of £40m to spare.

Promotion was, if anything, overdue, and achieved just in time. There is probably no team in the country that would have been as harmed by new restrictions imposed by Brexit, which make it harder for uncapped EU players to get a work permit. Without "Freedom of Movement", players like Christian Norgaard and Mathias Jensen (who both played for Denmark at Euro 2020), may not have qualified when they arrived, uncapped, at Griffin Park in 2019. The same goes for Frenchman Bryan Mbeumo, who contributed 41 Championship goals (24 goals, 17 assists) in the last two seasons. Promotion will allow them to sign established internationals, and also cast their net wider in search of talent.

Nevertheless, sweeping changes are not expected, nor particularly necessary. This summer has been the first in some years that Brentford have not had to replace one of their best players, and manager Thomas Frank's brand of football is more suited to the Premier League than the Championship.

The club have made significant strides in getting this far, but they are not done yet.

Jamie Evans

Brentford Community Stadium...the Bees left Griffin Park at the end of the 2019-20 season

PSG determined to end embarrassment

Chelsea's Champions League final victory over Manchester City was humiliating for Paris Saint-Germain. Masterminded by a coach in Thomas Tuchel that PSG had sacked mid-season for little more than a clash of personalities, aided by a former captain, Thiago Silva, who Paris had released a year earlier. Chelsea and their PSG alumni achieved in half a season what Paris have been desperately striving for across a decade of Qatari ownership. Images of Tuchel and Silva lifting the European Cup wearing the wrong shade of blue amounted to what was arguably the project's lowest ebb to date.

That embarrassment was compounded on the domestic front as Lille, whose first team cost roughly a third of PSG forward Neymar's gargantuan transfer fee, spectacularly dethroned the capital club to win Ligue 1. Paris' poor decision-making from the coach upwards has often made them their own worst enemies and, although crucially Neymar has signed a new deal, the club's inability to convince Kylian Mbappe so far to do the same amounts to another disastrous piece of mismanagement. As it stands, the 22-year-old €180m forward will see out the final year of his contract and leave on a free next summer. A catastrophe, both sportingly and financially.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

SERGIO RAMOS
(Paris Saint-Germain)
Now 35, Ramos' leadership, European knowhow and combative style will be more of use to PSG than his defensive acumen. His arrival doesn't bode well for Presnel Kimpembe, who continues to disappoint on big occasions.

MAXENCE CAQUERET
(Lyon)
Not always a starter under Rudi Garcia but consistently irresistible, the 21-year-old midfielder is central to OL's future. Coach Peter Bosz would do well to build his team around the talented Frenchman.

BURAK YILMAZ
(Lille)
Decisive in the title race, the 36-year-old Turkey striker was arguably European football's signing of the 2020-21 season. With a new coach and likely considerable squad turnover, another 18 goals would be very welcome.

WISSAM BEN YEDDER
(Monaco)
An inconsistent season saw Monaco's captain used more sparingly in the spring, but the 30-year-old France striker reacted well and finished the year in some of the best form of his career.

TEREM MOFFI
(Lorient)
An €8m fee was substantial for a club like Lorient but it proved well spent as the Nigerian striker's power, pace and intelligent finishing kept his side up having scored a memorable winner against PSG.

Final season?... Kylian Mbappe's PSG contract expires in 2022

Lots to do...PSG boss Mauricio Pochettino

Although signings of wing-back Achraf Hakimi (Internazionale), midfielder Georginio Wijnaldum (Liverpool), centre-back Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid) and goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma (Milan) have been made as much to impress Mbappe as to improve the team, they point to the resumption of normal service in Ligue 1.

Lille, whose first team cost roughly a third of PSG forward Neymar's gargantuan transfer fee, spectacularly dethroned the capital club to win Ligue 1

With the gradual return of crowds (PSG lost more league games at an empty Parc des Princes last term than in the previous seven seasons combined), plus the traditional talent exodus elsewhere, PSG are clear title favourites.

However, now that rumours of a shock departure have dissipated, Mauricio Pochettino still has plenty to do. Although the Argentine coach's incarnation of PSG admittedly remains under construction, in the early going they were often static defensively, weak against well-formed counter-attacks and struggled for creative inspiration when facing a low block. Although Pochettino's ability to mould a more exacting counter-attacking unit amounted to some memorable European victories over Barcelona and a Robert Lewandowski-less Bayern Munich, Manchester City's semi-final suffocation underlined just how far out of reach the club's "holy grail" remains in their current guise.

Meanwhile, reigning champions Lille are facing an entirely different reality. With *Les Dogues* under new ownership following the forcing out of Gerard Lopez by Elliott Management, inspirational coach Christophe Galtier departed for the ever-ambitious Nice after protracted negotiations between the clubs, while much of his title-winning side have either been sold or are up for sale. France goalkeeper Mike Maignan (Milan) and dynamic midfielder Boubakary Soumare (Leicester City) were the first to leave, as cash-strapped LOSC seek to use their success to help alleviate financial concerns.

After Laurent Blanc, Lucien Favre and Patrick Vieira all turned down the job, the appointment of Jocelyn Gourvennec as Galtier's replacement was a surprise, having won just six of his previous 39 Ligue 1 games. After a tumultuous spell at Bordeaux and overseeing Guingamp's relegation in 2019, Gourvennec has been unable to rediscover the spark that took Guingamp into Europe via a Coupe de France title during his first spell

LOIC BADE
(Rennes)
An impressive debut season helped promoted Lens to seventh and convinced Rennes to part with up to €20m. Potentially Ligue 1's next great defensive talent, his transition from a three to four-man defence will be interesting.

JONATHAN DAVID
(Lille)
After a €30m move from Gent, a glacial start – contributing just two goals in 25 outings – was concerning. But the Canadian blossomed in 2021 with 11 subsequent strikes, including winners against PSG and Marseille.

JEREMY DOKU
(Rennes)
The frighteningly skilful Belgium winger continued a strong end to the domestic season by impressing at Euro 2020. Barely 19, consistency and end product remain elusive but this should be a breakout year.

TEJI SAVANIER
(Montpellier)
Ligue 1's best-kept secret, a supremely gifted all-round creative midfielder. Often championed for a full international call-up, the 29-year-old was one of the three over-age players in France's Olympic squad.

ARKADIUSZ MILIK
(Marseille)
After ten goals in 16 games last season, the Pole, who missed Euro 2020 with a knee injury, may be the No.9 that OM have long searched for. As part of Jorge Sampaoli's more gung-ho side, he will certainly get chances.

in Brittany. Although top goalscorer Burak Yilmaz, under-rated stalwart midfielder Benjamin Andre and promising centre-back Sven Botman are likely to stay, an unpredictable coach without the scouting genius of Luis Campos for support means a return to Europe in any form will be Lille's aim as a new cycle begins.

Despite only being appointed last summer, Niko Kovac is now the longest-serving coach in last season's top-six and his Monaco side should provide the strongest title challenge outside Paris. Although the lack of European football helped, the speed at which Kovac moulded an aggressive, versatile and often thrilling outfit with a mix of experience, proven quality and exciting young talent was astonishing. A run of just one defeat in 19 league games miraculously kept Monaco in the title race on the final day. Although balancing European commitments will be tricky, a stable squad led by Wissam Ben Yedder, Kevin Volland and Kovac's shrewd management will be aiming for the Ligue 1 summit.

Often PSG's closest challengers, Lyon start afresh in 2021-22. Unable to make the Champions League despite an overpowered squad after minimal departures last summer, coach Rudi Garcia was replaced by former Ajax and Bayer Leverkusen manager Peter Bosz. Although talisman Memphis Depay left for Barcelona and the likes of Houssem Aouar may follow, Bosz still has the considerable midfield grace of Maxence Caqueret and Lucas Paqueta alongside a host of internationals to rely upon. The Champions' League will be Bosz's primary target.

Following key man Florian Thauvin's departure for Mexico, Jorge Sampaoli's new-look Marseille with join Lyon in the Europa League, having spent €20m on Flamengo midfielder Gerson and nearly €10m on making defender Leonardo Balerdi's stay permanent, while also adding winger Cengiz Under and goalkeeper Pau Lopez from Roma, as well as Arsenal duo William Saliba and Matteo Guendouzi on loan. Rennes will be France's first Europa Conference League representatives, while Galtier's Nice, aided by the resources of Jim Ratcliffe's INEOS, and Claude Puel's Saint-Etienne, whose talented squad quietly improved in 2021, will lead a gaggle of clubs looking to force their way into the top six.

After Monaco's 2017 Ligue 1 triumph, PSG responded by acquiring Neymar and Mbappe, before cantering to the title with their rivals weakened by summer losses. A similar narrative seems likely this season, but with Kovac and Monaco breathing down their necks domestically, more Champions League disappointment not unlikely, and the loss of the team's greatest asset without a obtaining a transfer fee remaining plausible, even greater embarrassment could be yet to come.

Adam White for GFFN

Moving on... Christophe Galtier left Ligue 1 champions Lille to join Nice

> The speed at which [Niko] Kovac moulded an aggressive, versatile and often thrilling outfit with a mix of experience, proven quality and exciting young talent was astonishing

Challengers... Monaco could be PSG's closest rivals

PROMOTED TEAMS

TROYES
Yo-yo club Troyes return with their best chance of staying up since they last survived in 2006. Talented young coach Laurent Batlles was linked with many top-flight jobs but should stay, while the club's induction into the City Football Group means greater resources and ability to attract talent. Batlles' back-three and forward line will however need revamping.

CLERMONT
A small club from Auvergne in central France, surprise Ligue 2 runners-up Clermont enter Ligue 1 for the first time in their history. Despite boasting 22-goal Ligue 2 top scorer Mohamed Bayo, Pascal Gastien's side are light on Ligue 1 experience and quality. Without significant reinforcements, their fairy tale will likely be short lived.

Brugge bidding to dominate

Champions...Brugge sealed back-to-back titles in 2021

Have Club Brugge outgrown Belgium? On the back of two league crowns and financial stability, the club's hierarchy likes to think so. Onwards and upwards with plans for a new 40,000-seater stadium on the site of the current Jan Breydelstadion under consideration, and perhaps even a BeNeliga, a cross-border league with the Netherlands, so as to generate more revenue and close the gap with Europe's elite. But plans can backfire, as the club's failed IPO demonstrated in painful fashion.

Even so, in the new campaign, Brugge will be confident of more silverware. Last season, "*Blauw-Zwart*" prevailed after a tight finish to defend their league title for the first time in 43 years. The team played engrossing and dominant football, resulting in a 16-point lead at the end of the regular season. That advantage was halved for the season-ending play-offs, an idiosyncratic mechanism in the Belgian league, allowing Racing Genk to briefly impress and even challenge.

Philippe Clement masterminded Brugge's success. His coaching career has been a victory parade, winning three titles in four years, first with Genk and then twice with Brugge. He is a modern coach with good tactical acumen and communication skills. He knows how to mould a squad, improve players like teenage poster boy Charles De Ketelaere and central defender Odilon Kossounou. Stubborn, he doesn't shy away from taking tough decisions, benching the team's midfield metronome Hans Vanaken when needed.

Ever since Michel Preud'homme restored Brugge's self-esteem in 2016 by guiding them to their first league title in 11 years, the club has taken flight. Sound financial management, capitalising on income from the Champions League and savvy transfer operations, dovetails with sporting success. Along with Genk, Brugge have been one of the few Belgian clubs with a positive balance sheet, booking €35 million profits in the 2019-20 season. It's no coincidence that they have been so dominant.

Brugge are the team to beat and their rivals know it. Can Genk, Gent, Antwerp or even Anderlecht prevent Brugge from establishing a hegemony? Genk should be Brugge's main contender, but will likely need to replace last season's top goalscorer Paul Onuachu, who has been heavily linked with a big summer transfer.

Gent dream big, claiming to compete with Brugge. But last season was a torrid one, pocked by disarray in the dugout and boardroom, a lack of mental fortitude and supporters' dismay. The club did ensure European football for this season, but the focus will now be domestically with coach Hein Vanhaezebrouck tasked with engineering a renaissance. Highly rated, he guided Gent to their maiden domestic crown in 2015 and led the team to the Champions League knockout phase a year later, either side of a short, unsuccessful spell at Anderlecht.

> **Brugge are the team to beat and their rivals know it. Can Genk, Gent, Antwerp or even Anderlecht prevent Brugge from establishing a hegemony?**

Revival is also the buzzword at Antwerp, where owner Paul Gheysens believes the sky is the limit. His club finished third under Frank Vercauteren, but didn't renew the coach's contract. His replacement, Brian Priske, will be expected to take the club to the next level having won the Danish league title with FC Midtjylland.

Revival...Antwerp are ready to compete again

However the most pressing question yet is who will succeed the controversial Luciano D'Onofrio as technical director.

In the capital, coach Vincent Kompany is beginning to find his feet after a wobbly start to his first full season at Anderlecht. He abandoned the rigid possession-based philosophy for a more pragmatic approach, yielding a European ticket. The club is staunchly proud and so another season not competing for the main prize won't be accepted. Kompany however will be without last season's top scorer Lukas Nmecha, who returned to Manchester City after his loan spell. Talented Yari Verschaeren has extended his contract, but there won't be much leeway for reinforcements: the club is burdened by colossal debts.

Mbaye Leye faces a similar situation at Standard Liege, but his presence transcends the mere game. He is one of only three former African internationals to coach at a top-flight club in a big European league – Angolan Lito Vidigal and Nigeria Ndubuisi Egbo are the other two. Last season, Leye guided Liege to the domestic cup final but lost to Genk, and will need results to survive.

Further down the table, cult club Union St Gillis return to the elite tier for the first time in 48 years. Led by Brighton & Hove Albion owner Tony Bloom, they will draw strength from the campaigns of both Beerschot and OH Leuven, who, last season, had no problems joining the big time. In a renewal of a cross-town rivalry, Union play Anderlecht in their curtain raiser. They are among Belgium's most decorated clubs, hoping to rekindle old glory and dethrone Brugge.

Samindra Kunti

Bayern cherry-pick Bundesliga's best with ten in a row in sight

PLAYERS TO WATCH

NADIEM AMIRI
(Bayer Leverkusen)
Dynamic, skilful and multi-dimensional midfielder, who does not always receive the recognition he is due. The 24-year-old of Afghan heritage has five Germany caps, the last of which came at the end of 2020.

WATARU ENDO
(Stuttgart)
Last season, his first in the Bundesliga following a move from Belgian side Sint-Truiden, the Japanese defensive midfielder was a revelation: strong on the ball, a great tackler, full of energy and an intelligent reader of the game.

JOSKO GVARDIOL
(RB Leipzig)
Treading the same route as Spain forward Dani Olmo, Gvardiol arrives in Leipzig from Dinamo Zagreb. RB have a nose for top-grade youngsters and believe they have another gem in the Croatia defender, on duty at the recent Euros.

GREGOR KOBEL
(Borussia Dortmund)
Excellent in goal for newly-promoted Stuttgart last season, the 23-year-old was recently rewarded with a €15m move to Dortmund. A Swiss U21 international, he was a late call-up to the Euro 2020 squad after an injury to Jonas Omlin.

STEFAN ORTEGA
(Arminia Bielefeld)
It speaks volumes for the German-born keeper of Spanish stock that Bayern have been tracking him. Apart from the 28-year-old's great shot-stopping ability, he is arguably the best ball-playing custodian in the Bundesliga.

Wunderkind... Bayern's new 34-year-old coach Julian Nagelsmann

Bold, innovative, incredibly flexible tactically, analytical to the nth degree and a consummate teacher: newly-installed Bayern Munich coach Julian Nagelsmann, just turned 34, rightly has a reputation as one of the brightest young bosses in the world game. When Hansi Flick opted to walk away at the end of last season, soon to re-emerge as Germany's next *Bundestrainer*, the former RB Leipzig man was an obvious choice to take over the reins at the Allianz Arena.

Champions for the last nine years and clear favourites to make it ten in a row, Bayern spared no expense to bring Nagelsmann on board, paying his former club RB Leipzig €25 million – a record transfer fee for a coach in Europe. Bayern's swoop for Nagelsmann was absolutely inevitable. This is what the Bavarians do to stay on top: target the main men of their domestic opponents and make them an offer they can't refuse. Tellingly Bayern did not just take Nagelsmann off RB's hands; they also headhunted Leipzig's outstanding young centre-back Dayot Upamecano. Once again, the Bavarians begin the season taking a step forward while their rivals are forced backwards.

> This is what the Bavarians do to stay on top: target the main men of their domestic opponents and make them an offer they can't refuse

Nagelsmann, a Bavarian who has always supported Bayern, has proved himself to be a class act these past few years, steering unfashionable Hoffenheim to the Champions League and enjoying considerable success in his two seasons with RB Leipzig: a Champions League semi-final spot in 2019-20 and second place in the Bundesliga last term. But neither his achievements nor *wunderkind* status will give him an easy ride at Bayern. The weight of expectations at Germany's top club is enough to give anyone sleepless nights and, if he does fail to deliver domestically in 2021-22, the five-year contract he has just signed will be quickly forgotten.

One of the most fascinating of the challenges facing Nagelsmann is how he deals with Bayern's copious roster of egos and exceptionalism. At previous clubs, Hoffenheim and Leipzig, Nagelsmann mainly worked with younger, inexperienced players. Up to now, he has never had to open lines of communication with such superstars as Thomas Muller, Robert Lewandowski or captain Manuel Neuer, who is a year older than his new manager. They will not be nearly so impressionable or inclined to toe the line.

Leaders...managing Bayern's senior players will likely be Nagelsmann's biggest challenge

NICO SCHLOTTERBECK
(Freiburg)
Very promising young centre-back who was an ever-present as Germany Under-21s claimed the European title this summer. Came back strong in the second half of last term after a lengthy spell out with a hamstring injury.

LARS STINDL
(Borussia Monchengladbach)
What would Glabach do without their evergreen attacking midfielder? Exemplary in both his creativity and finishing, the 32-year-old is the team's final-third brains. He sets the tone and provides the inspiration.

CHRISTOPHER TRIMMEL
(Union Berlin)
Whether used on the wing or at right-back, Union's golden oldie skipper is a constant source of will-to-win, sound leadership and assists (he managed ten last season). The Austrian offers inch-perfect delivery from set-pieces.

DAYOT UPAMECANO
(Bayern Munich)
Already one of the top five central defenders in the Bundesliga, the young France international, 22, has the potential to go even higher in the rankings. Bayern had to find €42.5m to trigger his RB Leipzig release clause this year.

WOUT WEGHORST
(Wolfsburg)
Late blooming striker, who played a part in countless goals for the upwardly mobile Wolves last term, scoring 20 and making another eight. The Dutch international combines an imposing physique, a deft touch and a killer instinct.

Serial winner... Jesse Marsch won back-to-back doubles in Austria

Another group Nagelsmann will have to win over is the Bayern supporters. A substantial number of them are convinced that Flick – who led Bayern to a marvellous clean sweep in 2019-20 of Champions League, Bundesliga and German Cup – was not sufficiently backed by the club, and that he would not have left if director of sport Hasan Salihamidzic had not ridden roughshod over his recruitment needs. Many Bayern supporters would have preferred to see Flick stay and Salihamidzic shown the door. For the fans, Flick's departure made little sense. Why pay a huge amount of compensation for Nagelsmann when you already have a highly successful coach?

A new broom is very much sweeping at the Allianz Arena at the moment. As well as the Nagelsmann appointment, three seasoned pros have left (Real Madrid-bound David Alaba, Jerome Boateng and Javi Martinez) and, for the first time in nearly two decades, they have a new chief executive in former goalkeeper Oliver Kahn, who has taken over from the long-serving Karl-Heinz Rummenigge. Kahn will certainly have his work cut out. According to club president Herbert Hainer, the coronavirus pandemic has reduced Bayern's turnover by a whopping €150m.

Mindful of such losses, Bayern will be looking to Nagelsmann to initiate a more organic approach to squad-building, with less off-the-peg big buys, more emphasis on the nurturing of fresh-faced new signings and greater opportunities to graduates from the academy. This, at least is the long-term plan. The all-important question is will they be able to stick to it.

Bayern were not the only top-fight outfit to undergo a technical area makeover in the off-season. Seven other teams also have a new coach to unveil, including each of last season's top six. Not surprisingly, RB Leipzig, went shopping for Nagelsmann's replacement at Red Bull sister club Salzburg, appointing the impressive American Jesse Marsch; Dortmund have high hopes that former Borussia Monchengladbach boss Marco Rose will make them far more consistent; while Gladbach took advantage of a €7.5m release clause to snatch Adi Hutter from Eintracht Frankfurt.

Another Austrian, Oliver Glasner, replaces Hutter at the Deutsche Bank Park. After steering Wolfsburg to a fourth-place finish last term, the former LASK boss turned down Champions League football in order to take the Frankfurt job. The Wolves in turn have plumped for the former Bayern Munich and Netherlands midfield warrior Mark van Bommel, whose last job was at PSV Eindhoven. Gerardo Seoane, a serial title winner in Switzerland with Young Boys of Bern, now has the keys at Bayer Leverkusen, while Cologne, who only stayed up last season via a promotion/relegation play-off victory over Holstein Kiel – have substituted veteran fire-fighter Friedhelm Funkel for ex-Paderborn manager Steffen Baumgart.

> **Seven other teams also have a new coach to unveil, including each of last season's top six**

So many new coaches, so many imponderables. The 59th Bundesliga campaign could be a cracker.

Nick Bidwell

PROMOTED TEAMS

BOCHUM
Eleven years after their last relegation from the Bundesliga, the Ruhr side are back for another top-flight tour of duty, after winning last season's second division. All credit to coach Thomas Reis who has forged a close-knit, well-organised and pro-active side in his two seasons in charge. Do they have enough elite experience in the squad? Absolutely not. The entire squad has only amassed some 220 Bundesliga matches.

GREUTHER FURTH
The Clover Leaves, second-tier runners-up in 2020-21, may have next to no Bundesliga pedigree – having played only once in the elite in 2012-13 – but have much going for them nonetheless: an excellent coach in Stefan Leitl, effectiveness as a *gegenpressing* unit and technical quality a plenty. The flip-side? The summer departure of brilliant Germany Under-21 left-back David Raum, who was snapped up by Hoffenheim.

Under pressure... coach Marco Rose swapped Borussia Monchengladbach for Borussia Dortmund

Dominant Ajax strengthen with controversial transfer

Controversial... Berghuis was named Feyenoord captain in 2019

The transfer market in the Eredivisie started slowly and hasn't come to an end yet. However, it will be difficult to see a more controversial move than the €4 million deal taking Steven Berghuis from Feyenoord to arch-rivals Ajax. The deal came as a massive shock, especially in Rotterdam.

And Feyenoord supporters will not forgive the winger. There were videos of a fan burning his shirt, while he also received several threats.

Going from Rotterdam to Amsterdam has always been a sensitive move. That's why only four players in history have left the harbour city for the capital: Henk Groot (in 1965), Jan Everse (in 1977) and Arnold Scholten (in 1995). There have been more that have gone in the opposite direction, since in Amsterdam they don't make such a fuss about it.

The last player to move directly between the clubs was goalkeeper Kenneth Vermeer in 2014, who went from warming the bench at Ajax to starting between the sticks at De Kuip. Back then in Rotterdam, they were pretty pleased with such a scoop.

With this deal, Ajax have claimed their payback. After all, did they really need a 29-year-old winger with a front-line of Sebastien Haller, Antony and Dusan Tadic, who has just signed a new contract? Why weaken the opposition by signing their best player and only current Dutch international when you are the strongest anyway? Why take a player who collects unnecessary red cards and has openly criticised his club's tactics?

Ajax coach Erik ten Hag, who has ruled himself out of contention for the national team job in the next two years, will point out that he needs strength in depth to make it to the latter stages in European football. Especially given that Lassina Traore has joined Shakhtar Donetsk and another winger, David Neres, has been linked with an exit.

Nevertheless it will be interesting to see what reception Berghuis receives when the two rivals meet at De Kuip on December 19 – which, incidentally, is the day of his 30th birthday. He has no doubt heard about a bizarre incident 41 years ago when Wim Jansen, a European Cup winner with Feyenoord, joined Ajax from Washington Diplomats. Temperatures in Rotterdam in December 1980 were below zero, with the reception from the crowd even frostier. During the warm-up, Jansen was hit just below his eye by a snowball and was forced to withdraw.

> **Feyenoord supporters will not forgive the winger. There were videos of a fan burning his shirt, while he also received several threats**

Yet Ten Hag has bigger worries than Berghuis, not least in goal, with Andre Onana determined to join his ex-coach Peter Bosz at Lyon. The feeling is that the Cameroon keeper is ungrateful for all the support (and his salary) he has continued to receive during his doping suspension. Euro 2020 showed that stand-in Maarten Stekelenburg is reliable but not someone who makes the difference in Europe.

In demand...PSV pair Donyell Malen and Denzel Dumfries

Still, Ten Hag doesn't have much to worry about when it comes to domestic football. Winning a third title in a row should not be much of a problem for Ajax, although PSV have strengthened.

After a miserable first season German coach Roger Schmidt is making up for lost time. The Eindhoven club have signed Marco van Ginkel permanently from Chelsea, Andre Ramalho from Schmidt's former club Red Bull Salzburg, Davy Propper (Brighton) and goalkeeper Joel Drommel (FC Twente). That looks promising, but the downside is that star players like Denzel Dumfries, Cody Gakpo and Donyell Malen will probably be leaving before the deadline.

Meanwhile, Feyenoord boss Arne Slot, who was fired by AZ halfway through last season after announcing his move, will try to replace Berghuis with former Eredivisie top scorer Alireza Jahanbakhsh. Further arrivals are Israeli keeper Ofir Marciano, Norwegian right-back Marcus Holmgren Pedersen and attacking-midfielder Guus Til. However, key players like Marcos Senesi and Tyrell Malacia could still be leaving, as Feyenoord need the cash.

Whether AZ, who shared the top spot with Ajax in the pandemic-limited season two years ago, can compete will depend on what happens to their "Fab Four": Calvin Stengs has already left to join Nice in a €15m deal, but will Teun Koopmeiners, Myron Boadu and Owen Wijndal follow him through the exit door?

It is a common theme among Ajax's rivals: the losses are bigger than the gains. That's why it is hard to see the Eredivisie trophy leaving Amsterdam.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

Allegri's return makes Juve the team to beat again

PLAYERS TO WATCH

KEVIN AGUDELO
(Genoa)
The aggressive Colombian midfielder has been passed between Genoa, Fiorentina and Spezia over the last two seasons, playing a key role in keeping the latter up last year. Those displays may yet earn him a big move from parent club Genoa.

FELIPE ANDERSON
(Lazio)
After a poor season with Porto, will the ex-West Ham attacker show something like his old form at Lazio, where he has returned for a sixth season? Judging by the warm reception he received on his return, the fans will give him a chance.

HAKAN CALHANOGLU
(Internazionale)
Calhanoglu will be closely watched. In the past, city cousins Inter and Milan have swapped players to dramatic effect. Remember Andrea Pirlo's 2001 move in the opposite direction where he went on to become one of the best in the world?

OLIVIER GIROUD
(Milan)
The 34-year-old France striker must overcome a deal of scepticism as he steps into a Milan set-up where he may become a deputy for 39-year-old Zlatan Ibrahimovic. He will be keen to prove that he is not just here for the ride.

MIKE MAIGNAN
(Milan)
Former Lille goalkeeper Maignan steps into some of the most intimidating boots in the world when he replaces Euro 2020 Player of the Tournament, Gigi Donnarumma, who joined Paris Saint-Germain on a free transfer.

Returning... Allegri spent two years away from Juventus

As thousands lined the streets of Rome on the day after Italy's win in the Euro 2020 final to applaud their returning heroes, it was tempting not to recall the "*Triumphus*" (Roman Triumph) once held by the Emperors of Ancient Rome on their return from a successful foreign campaign.

With both state president Sergio Mattarella and prime minister Mario Draghi holding enthusiastic state receptions for the team, it was absolutely clear that no one was underestimating the importance of the moment. Socially, culturally, economically and, of course in strict football terms, this was a terrific post-COVID triumph that Italy badly needed.

Starved of meaningful international success for the last 11 years (since Jose Mourinho's Inter won the 2010 Champions League), once dominant Italian football has had to eat industrial quantities of humble pie in a world dominated by the economic power of the Premier League. Then, too, in Italy (and elsewhere) this Euro 2020 success was inevitably seen as much more than a football match, rather as a victory for the European Union over Brexit Britain – even if that obviously makes no football sense.

What to say of the new season? Surprise, surprise, no side goes into it looking stronger than Juventus

As we prepare for the new Serie A season, we have to acknowledge that Euro 2020 represented a huge morale boost for both Italian football in general and for Serie A in particular. Just look at some of the Euro stats: only players from one club – English champions Manchester City – featured in more games at the finals than those from Juventus, the powerhouse of Italian football.

Of course, those numbers are significantly boosted by the fact that we had an Italy v England final, but it is still good news for Serie A. As is the consideration that little Atalanta had nine players at the finals, with five of them getting on the scoresheet – namely Miranchuk (Russia), Gosens (Germany), Pasalic (Croatia), Maehle (Denmark) and Pessina (Italy).

Partnership...Lukaku and Martinez will lead the line for holders Inter

If Mancini's Italy represents the new face of the *Azzurri*, then Atalanta represent the new face of Serie A today. Gian Piero Gasperini's side play an intense and high-tempo attacking game that, at times, has much in common with Mancini's Italy.

What to say of the new season? Surprise, surprise, no side goes into it looking stronger than Juventus. With Massimiliano Allegri back as coach after a two-year break, Cristiano Ronaldo

GIACOMO RASPADORI
(Sassuolo)
Yet another talent from the Sassuolo stable that gave us both Locatelli and Berardi at Euro 2020, the twice capped Raspadori also featured at the Euros, coming on as a substitute in Italy's 1-0 victory over Wales. Mobile and nippy.

GIANLUCA SCAMACCA
(Sassuolo)
The 6ft 5in striker has been compared to Ibrahimovic. Capped 15 times for Italy U21s, with experience of Dutch division two football, he had a spell with Genoa last season. A move to Juventus or Fiorentina is not out of the question.

DUSAN VLAHOVIC
(Fiorentina)
The Serbian striker is one of the most sought after players in Serie A. Scorer of 21 league goals at an underwhelming Fiorentina last season, he has always looked a class act. *La Viola* have reportedly slapped a €60m price tag on him.

NICOLO ZANIOLO
(Roma)
Arguably, no single player could be more important for Jose Mourinho's return to Italian football. If Zaniolo rediscovers his best form, again coming back from injury as he did last year, Mourinho's prospects would be a lot brighter.

PIOTR ZIELINSKI
(Napoli)
With Napoli's record scorer, Dries Mertens, currently out injured, huge responsibility sits on Zielinski. Now in his sixth season with Napoli, the Poland ace has always looked like an attacking player of huge potential. Now is the time to prove it.

Juventus target... Sassuolo midfielder Manuel Locatelli

staying, Federico Chiesa and Italy captain, Giorgio Chiellini, "gassed up" from their Euro 2020 win, and Paolo Dybala feeling that he has something to prove, Juventus start the new season as favourites to resume their almost decade-long dominance of Serie A.

On top of all that, it is not impossible that Juventus will strengthen their midfield with the acquisition of Euro 2020 hero Manuel Locatelli from Sassuolo. Also, undaunted by the failure of the European Super League project, in July, Juventus announced a €400m ($476m) capital increase.

Obviously, reigning champions Inter will pose a serious challenge to the Old Lady. However, the departure of key figures in last season's winning side, namely coach Antonio Conte and wing-back Achraf Hakimi (Paris Saint-Germain for €68m), does not bode well.

New coach Simone Inzaghi inherits a very strong squad containing attacking duo Romelu Lukaku and Lautaro Martinez, plus Marcelo Brozovic, Stefan de Vrij and Milan Skriniar, not to mention Euro 2020 winners Nicolo Barella and Alessandro Bastoni as well as new signing, Hakan Calhanoglu, a free transfer from Milan.

However, his predecessor Conte left the club just days after winning the title, reportedly because the club's Chinese owners, Suning, need to run a very tight ship this year after a €3.9bn loss for the year 2020. Will more players be sold?

In the absence of Inter, who is left as a serious challenger? Is it too fanciful to think that Atalanta, third-place finishers in the last three seasons, could be contenders? Will last season's runners-up, Milan, still featuring the evergreen 39-year-old Zlatan Ibrahimovic and led by Stefano Pioli, climb one extra wrung up the ladder? Will Napoli, now coached by Luciano Spalletti and led by (currently injured) all-time top scorer, Dries Mertens, finally realise the promise of recent seasons?

On top of all that, in a Serie A that has seen 11 coaching changes, there is the return of "Special One" Jose Mourinho. Greeted with street murals and wild excitement by Roma fans, Mourinho was presented to the media on a hot July morning at Rome Town Hall, overlooking the ancient Roman Forum. Asked why he had returned to Italy, he quoted the Emperor Marcus Aurelius whose statue stands just around the corner: "*Nulla viene dal nulla*" – nothing comes from nothing and nothing returns to nothing.

If nothing else, it looks like the quality of manager press conferences around here is destined to improve in the new season.

Paddy Agnew

> [Antonio] Conte left [Inter] just days after winning the title, reportedly because the club's Chinese owners, Suning, need to run a very tight ship this year...Will more players be sold?

PROMOTED TEAMS

EMPOLI
Serie B champions Empoli will be returning to Serie A after a two-year absence following a dominant title-winning season. As always, avoiding relegation will be the main priority and, to that end, the club has reappointed experienced coach Aurelio Andreazzoli for his third spell in charge.

SALERNITANA
Salernitana finished four points behind Empoli to claim the other automatic promotion spot, yet it was only early in July that their place in Serie A was confirmed, as the club were owned by Claudio Lotito, owner of Lazio. Federation rules forbidding dual-club ownership have, for the time being, been "circumvented" by the creation of Trust Fund ownership. This one will run and run.

VENEZIA
Venezia are back in the top flight 20 years after their last promotion to Serie A after beating Cittadella in the Serie B play-off final. Coach Paolo Zanetti, the man behind their promotion, has been confirmed but he faces a massive task to avoid relegation. Several additions have been drafted in to help fight the fight.

Special One...a mural to Roma's new manager

Veteran...Zlatan Ibrahimovic will turn 40 in October

Ange tasked with toppling Rangers

Champions...right-back James Tavernier was one of Rangers' stars of last season

Steven Gerrard painted a perfect picture for Rangers last season. An unbeaten Scottish Premiership campaign could provide the template for more success this season.

The only change in the Glasgow landscape is the arrival of Ange Postecoglou at Celtic. The former Australia national team coach was recruited from Yokohama F. Marinos in Japan for his first big job in Europe, with the mission of rebuilding Celtic.

The Ibrox side created a 25-point gap over their rivals, whose attempt to win a record ten titles in a row went completely off the rails, with Neil Lennon sacked in February. Gerrard's men were so dominant in collecting 102 points (32 wins and six draws in 38 games, conceding just 13 goals). They were unbeaten in all four of their league clashes with Celtic, winning three, and also knocked them out of the Scottish Cup.

Gerrard's side performed so smoothly last season that only a few squad additions have been made. The bigger question mark, yet again, is whether Alfredo Morelos will remain at Ibrox. Porto are keen to sign the Colombia striker, just as Lille were last summer. Midfielder Glen Kamara is also a target for English clubs after shining for Finland at Euro 2020.

However, despite all the impressive numbers on the pitch, those off it are poor. Rangers are still operating at a loss and the club's board admitted in June that the books would have to be balanced with some player sales.

Postecoglou is not the first Celtic manager to be recruited from Japan. Wim Jansen did likewise in 1997 and reclaimed power from Rangers, winning the title in his only season. If Postecoglou emulates Jansen, the Celtic board will be overjoyed.

Born in Greece, the Australian's only previous experience in Europe was a "learning curve" season in the Greek third tier in 2008. After that, he struck success in the A-League with Brisbane Roar, winning three trophies in three years to land the Australia job. He stepped down almost immediately after sealing qualification for the 2018 World Cup, joining Yokohama where he won the J.League.

Just as his parents overcame turning up in Australia without a word of English, so Postecoglou did the same in Japan and translated his methods into success. The 55-year-old is not concerned about any "football snobbery" with regards to his background, and is convinced that he will adapt to Scottish football's culture.

"There is no bigger cultural challenge than coaching in a country where you don't speak the language," Postecoglou says. "I did that in Japan. That's why I went. I loved the challenge. Without any Japanese, I had to get my message across in a different way and the players responded and we were successful.

> "I want to create a football team that everyone talks about. I think I can give the Celtic fans a team that is special"
>
> Celtic manager Ange Postecoglou

"I can't alter other people's opinions about me working on the other side of the world but I know Celtic are not like that. They are informed. Especially as one of their greatest players, Shunsuke Nakamura, came from Japan."

Newcomer... Ange Postecoglou replaced Neil Lennon as Celtic's manager

Postecoglou says he is not put off by the scale of the rebuild at Celtic, with midfielder Ryan Christie and striker Odsonne Edouard likely to leave the club, along with Norway defender, Kris Ajer.

"You only get these opportunities during difficult times," he said. "I don't think Celtic would have brought me across if they had won ten in a row and were flying. Yes, there's a lot to do but that doesn't put me off, it excites me. That is what I have done throughout my career.

"I want to create a football team that everyone talks about. I think I can give the Celtic fans a team that is special. If we can get that right, and be a success, then it will be good."

Replacing Edouard, last season's Premiership top scorer, will be near the top of the priorities. Last summer, Celtic had their fingers burned by poor imports from abroad, and are likely to rely on domestic recruits, especially given that David Turnbull – a £3 million signing from Motherwell in 2020 – was last season's Player of the Year.

Top of their radar is Kevin Nisbet, whose 18 goals helped Hibernian to third place in 2020-21. The striker scored his first Scotland goal in a 2-2 draw with the Netherlands ahead of Euro 2020, where he made three substitute appearances.

Elsewhere, the Edinburgh and Dundee derbies will be back on the calendar, with Hearts and Dundee winning promotion from the Championship to resume their rivalries with Hibernian and Dundee United.

Much will also be expected of St. Johnstone, sensational winners of a Scottish Cup and League Cup double in an incredible season, the first team (other than Celtic and Rangers) to do so since Aberdeen in 1990.

Phil Gordon

Same contenders, different approaches

Sporting's first title since 2001-02 represented a refreshing change in Portuguese football after two decades of Benfica and Porto hegemony. Going into the new season, the three traditional powerhouses look well matched, but have adopted differing approaches in the quest for supremacy. While Benfica and Porto's squads are primarily made up of experienced campaigners, most of them non-Portuguese, Sporting are sticking to the policy of promoting from within their academy and, when dipping into the transfer market, putting their trust in young recruits.

On March 20, 2021 Sporting midfielder Dario Essugo was brought on as a late substitute against Vitoria Guimaraes, one week after his 16th birthday. Essugo became the youngest-ever debutant in the club's history and came to symbolise Sporting coach Ruben Amorim's absolute faith in youth players. "This sends a message to young players in Portugal," said Amorim in the post-match press conference. "When it comes to choosing a club, you know that here you will be given opportunities."

Those were not empty words. Defenders Nuno Mendes, Pedro Porro and Goncalo Inacio, midfielders Pedro Goncalves, Matheus Nunes and Daniel Braganca, and forwards Tiago Tomas and Jovane Cabral, all 22 years old or younger, played key roles in Sporting's championship conquest. And the coach's casting of the net to entice Portugal's best young players to Alvalade appears to be bearing fruits. When the contract of Porto's promising 17-year-old Goncalo Esteves came to an end this summer, the right-back headed south to the capital to join Sporting.

Young guns... Sporting won the title last season

An emotional farewell video posted on social media, thanking Porto's youth training staff for all they had done for him, showed Esteves had no hard feelings towards his first club. He simply felt the route to first-team football for academy graduates is blocked under the current regime. It is an understandable viewpoint. Porto became the first Portuguese side to win the UEFA Youth League, in 2018-19, but from a team packed with star quality, there has been a distinct lack of progress to the senior side.

Extravagantly talented players such as Diogo Costa, Fabio Vieira, Vitor Ferreira and Diogo Leite shone

PLAYERS TO WATCH

LUIS DIAZ
(Porto)
A deceptively languid style masks an audacity and eye for opportunity that enables the Colombia winger to score spectacular goals – just as he showcased at the Copa America.

GONCALO INACIO
(Sporting)
Still a teenager, Inacio proved up to the task when thrust into the first team last season, his cool defending complemented by excellent distribution and an extremely cultured left foot.

DARWIN NUNEZ
(Benfica)
A frustrating first campaign in Portugal for the burly Uruguayan striker, with injuries and COVID-19 halting his progress, but when on song he showed he is a potent attacking weapon.

Father's son...Porto's young winger Francisco Conceicao

brightly as Portugal made the final of the Under-21 European Championship, but they have been restricted to bit-part roles for Porto.

Coach Sergio Conceicao can justifiably point to two title wins in four seasons and impressive showings in the Champions League during his tenure. The Dragons have been fiercely competitive under Conceicao, mirroring the demeanour of the former Porto hero during his playing days. However, he has relied heavily on experienced players and veterans such as Agustin Marchesin, Pepe and Matheus Uribe. Rumblings of fan discontent about squandering an exceptionally gifted generation of academy players only increased in volume upon Sporting's youth-injected success.

Whether Conceicao will integrate young blood into the team will be one of the running stories to look out for in 2021-22, especially given the fascinating caveat that one of Porto and Portugal's most exciting up-and-coming talents is none other than Sergio's 18-year-old son, Francisco Conceicao. A nimble, zippy winger with the same fire in his belly as his father, Conceicao made a big impact when coming off the bench last season, before shining at the U21 Euros in the summer, and surely a bigger role awaits him this campaign. But can the coach pick him and continue to ignore the other academy pearls?

This time last year Benfica went into the new campaign as red-hot favourites to win the Primeira Liga having lured coach Jorge Jesus back from his highly-successful Brazilian venture at Flamengo and splashed out over €100 million on new recruits. As such, the unmitigated disaster that unfolded was a big surprise and hugely embarrassing for Portugal's most popular club. A poor showing in Europe, going out of the title race months before the end of the season, and meek defeats in the Super Cup, League Cup and Portuguese Cup final weakened the standing of coach Jesus. It also undermined the position of long-term president Filipe Luis Vieira, who has since stepped down from his role after being placed under house arrest for alleged money-laundering.

Vieira was re-elected to his position just last year, largely on the back of his re-employment of Jesus and the promise of a return to the glory days. Now, the boardroom is under attack and Benfica desperately need a strong season to stabilise.

A player who may help them achieve that is ex-Portugal international Joao Mario. Benfica "poached" the midfielder from under Sporting's noses, following the end of his Inter contract – a move that has led to accusations of improper dealings in order to avoid a hefty transfer clause. Mario spent last season on loan with Sporting, and his experience and guile were crucial in helping the Lions secure the title. Should he settle well at Benfica – under a coach with whom he produced the best season of his career in 2015-16 – the return of Jesus may yet prove to have been a wise decision.

Tom Kundert

> "This sends a message to young players in Portugal: when it comes to choosing a club, you know that here you will be given opportunities"
>
> **Ruben Amorim, Sporting coach**

Under pressure... Benfica boss Jorge Jesus

Another tight title race

Upon the full-time whistle that brought the 2020-21 season to a close, Diego Simeone simply burst out laughing on the sidelines at Valladolid. The Atletico Madrid boss had just won his second La Liga title and the club's first since 2014. "I can't stop laughing for some reason," he told reporters after the game.

Atleti have always thrived under their underdog status, but last campaign was different. They led the league from the off and by the halfway point had 50 points – a double-digit points lead over their rivals.

Perhaps inevitably, their form dipped – collecting 17 points from their following 13 games – and the advantage was slowly whittled away by Real Madrid and Barcelona, who hit their strides in the second half of the campaign. Sevilla, who finished on a club-record points tally of 77, joined them in a four-way title race.

Spanish clubs won seven of the ten Champions League finals between 2009 and 2018, but La Liga has not produced a finalist since then with the balance of power shifting away from Spain.

What was bad news for La Liga's European coefficient proved to be a godsend for its title race, as the flaws in its top teams produced a league more competitive than ever before. Going into the closing weeks of the campaign, four teams still held ambitions of the title while six teams harboured genuine relegation worries. Six of the ten matches on the final day had a direct influence on the title race, fight for European spots or relegation.

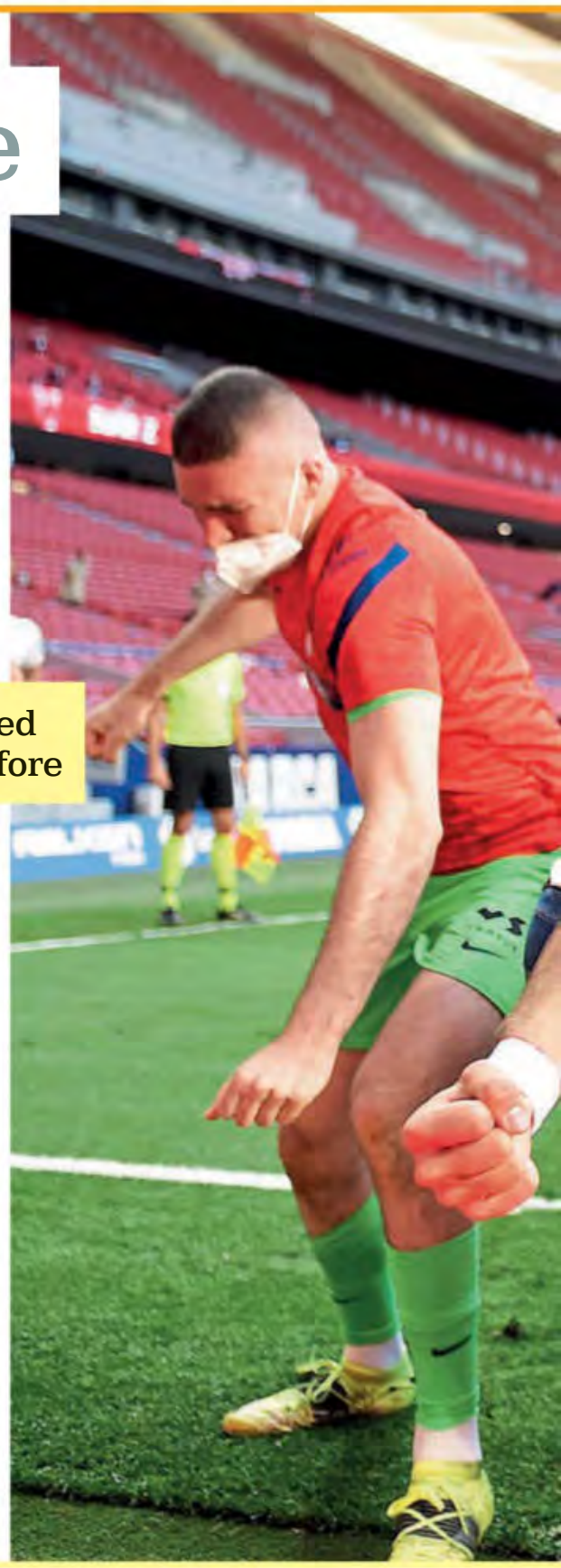
The flaws in La Liga's top teams produced a league more competitive than ever before

Atletico were worthy title winners but achieved it through the only way they know: lots of suffering. Edgy, 1-0 wins over relegation-threatened Alaves and Elche saw their opponents miss late penalties in each encounter, while the penultimate day of the season saw them fall behind at home to Osasuna in the 74th minute only to launch a late winning comeback.

A similar pattern repeated itself on the final day – knowing only a win at Real Valladolid, themselves fighting for survival, would suffice - they fell behind, only to edge out a 2-1 win. No wonder Simeone was laughing; the relief was palpable.

Atleti will undoubtedly have their eyes on another league title this year; but will rely on Jan Oblak – arguably the world's best goalkeeper – and star striker Luis Suarez, who netted 21 La Liga goals last season, to remain in top form. ➤

Still going strong... Atleti's Luis Suarez



PLAYERS TO WATCH

PEDRI
(Barcelona)
The 18-year-old played 61 games last season and is already an automatic starter for Barcelona and Spain. A worthy successor to midfield legends Andres Iniesta and Xavi, the pass-master appears destined for true greatness.

RODRIGO DE PAUL
(Atletico Madrid)
The outstanding player in the Copa America final, setting up the winning goal with a sumptuous through ball. As one of the best dribbler's in Serie A last season for Udinese, De Paul will add plenty to Atletico Madrid's midfield.

ALEXANDER ISAK
(Real Sociedad)
One of the breakout stars of Euro 2020, Isak was raised in Sweden by Eritrean parents. His skill, speed and directness have seen him score 72 senior goals by the age of 21. Has been linked with Arsenal and Barcelona.

IAGO ASPAS
(Celta Vigo)
Aspas is Celta's captain, leader, talisman; no one player is as important to any La Liga club. Aged 33, he is in the form of his career, scoring 103 league goals across six seasons. Was unlucky to miss out on Euro 2020 selection.

JULES KOUNDE
(Sevilla)
The Andalusians turned down Manchester City's £50 million bid for defensive star Kounde a year ago because he is worth much more. The Frenchman is swiftly establishing himself as an elite defensive talent.

Champs...Atletico Madrid won last season's La Liga in dramatic fashion

JOSE LUIS MORALES
(Levante)
Aged 34, winger Morales, dubbed "*El Comandante*", embodies the most admirable qualities of a footballer: hard work, graft, spirit and belief. His mindset? "Football is to be enjoyed – I prefer to win 5-4 than 1-0!"

YEREMY PINO
(Villarreal)
Teenage star Yeremy debuted for Villarreal last season, scoring seven goals and starting the Europa League final triumph over Manchester United. The versatile forward has a bright future ahead of him.

BORJA IGLESIAS
(Real Betis)
Nicknamed "Panda", Iglesias is the most expensive Betis signing this century, but hit just four goals in his first 52 appearances, then 12 in his next 17 to spearhead European qualification. The striker is an advocate of fan rights and societal issues.

MARTIN ODEGAARD
(Real Madrid)
Revitalised after a starring cameo role on loan at Arsenal during the second half of last season, the Norwegian is back in Madrid and hopeful of cementing a first-team spot in a creative midfield role under Carlo Ancelotti.

MARCOS LLORENTE
(Atletico Madrid)
With 12 La Liga goals and 11 assists last season, the versatile Llorente is a player reborn: in peak physical condition, tactically flexible and a relentless winner. An embodiment of Atletico Madrid's success.

Across the capital, Real Madrid have not enjoyed the same level of stability. Boss Zinedine Zidane left the club for the third time in his career, replaced by the returning Carlo Ancelotti. Club captain Sergio Ramos is gone too; his 16-year career in Madrid over after losing a game of poker with the club in lengthy contract negotiations. The likelihood is Raphael Varane – out of contract next year – will also depart, with the club unable to offer him an improved wage.

Madrid are not short of experience; Luka Modric, Toni Kroos, Casemiro and Karim Benzema remain elite-level performers, while the versatile David Alaba has arrived on a free from Bayern Munich. The returning Martin Odegaard may offer some much-needed creativity in the final third and there are hopes that Vinicius Junior, Rodrygo and Marco Asensio may produce a consistent run of performances. However, the ongoing fitness issues of Eden Hazard and financial restrictions may mean they fall just short again this season.

Contenders... Europa League winners Villarreal

The financial problems at Madrid pale in comparison to the drastic situation at arch-rivals Barcelona though, whose entire club debt stands at over €1 billion. A series of sellable assets – including striker Suarez, who was ironically decisive in Atletico's title success – last year has not quelled the financial issues.

Players such as Philippe Coutinho, Samuel Umtiti, Miralem Pjanic, Ousmane Dembele and Antoine Griezmann (the latter linked with a return to his former club Atletico Madrid) are now notable drains on the club's resources.

The club have added free agents Sergio Aguero, Eric Garcia and Memphis Depay, while re-signing Emerson Royal from Real Betis. However, their most significant piece of business was getting Lionel Messi to agree to a new five-year deal on half of his previous salary – its official announcement dependent on player departures to fund the deal.

Another positive for Barca is the form of tremendously gifted teenage midfielder Pedri – signed last year from Las Palmas and Euro 2020's Young Player of the Tournament. They have similarly high hopes for sensational young forward Ansu Fati, although a knee injury picked up last November has required three surgeries and there are worries over the curtailment to his development.

Sevilla will be hopeful of not only keeping pace with the leading pack but storming into the top three, while Europa League winners Villarreal will aim to better a disappointing seventh-place league finish. Real Sociedad and Real Betis will compete in the Europa League – burdens which may stretch their squads beyond potential domestic success.

Real Madrid's Ancelotti is one of four new coaching appointments, with Jose Bordalas swapping Getafe for Valencia – who continue to be riddled with financial issues, a deeply unpopular absentee owner, and the reality of another campaign in the wrong half of the table.

> The financial problems at Real Madrid pale in comparison to the drastic situation at arch-rivals Barcelona, whose entire club debt stands at over €1 billion

With finances limited across the league, this season is likely to play out like the last. Do not expect any of Spain's five representatives to win the Champions League, but the title race is likely to go to the wire in thrilling fashion; Simeone will be hoping to have the last laugh once more.

Colin Millar

PROMOTED TEAMS

ESPANYOL
There was little surprise that Espanyol won the Segunda title and bounced back to La Liga at the first time of asking. Vicente Moreno's side retained the majority of their stars following relegation – including leading goalscorer and record signing Raul de Tomas – and will be hopeful of consolidating this year.

MALLORCA
As with Espanyol, the Islanders won comfortable automatic promotion having been relegated the previous year. They have either been promoted or relegated in each of the previous five seasons and will look to invest to avoid the same outcome this time.

RAYO VALLECANO
From the Madrid neighbourhood of Vallecas, Rayo Vallecano are back in La Liga after a two-year absence and having sneaked into the promotion play-offs in sixth place. They have the lowest budget and smallest squad in the top flight – anything other than relegation would be seen as a notable success.

Returning...Carlo Ancelotti begins his second spell at Real Madrid

Arrival...Aguero is one of several new faces at Barcelona

Fans getting ready to return

Now that the anger has dissipated a little in the wake of Turkey's disastrous Euro 2020 campaign, the massed ranks of Super Lig devotees are increasingly turning their attention to the enticing prospect of being able to attend games once more. After 15 months of playing behind closed doors because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Turkish federation recently announced that all pro clubs would be allowed to fill their stadia to 50 per cent capacity.

Needless to say, the unveiling of the season's fixture list had supporters scrambling to pore over the schedule, with fans of the Istanbul "Big Three" anxious to know when the derbies would take place. The first of the showpiece games will be held on matchday ten when reigning champions Besiktas host last season's runners-up Galatasaray at Vodafone Park. Galatasaray and Fenerbahce will go head-to-head on week 13, while Besiktas travel to Fenerbahce on matchday 17.

A large proportion of the summer transfer chatter has centred around the southern city of Adana, where newly-promoted Demirspor, back in the top flight for the first time in 26 years, have been making quite a splash. Demirspor, whose nickname is the "Blue Lightning" have certainly generated electricity aplenty with a hat-trick of high-profile signings: Italian striker Mario Balotelli – picked up on a free from Serie B Monza – highly-experienced Moroccan attacking midfielder Younes Belhanda (ex-Galatasaray) and Congolese front-man Britt Assombalonga (previously with Nottingham Forest and Middlesbrough in the English second tier).

Some in the Turkish media believe Demirspor have over-exposed themselves financially, that Balotelli's three-year deal and other recruitment commitments will eventually lead to cash-flow problems. Demirspor president Murat Sancak vehemently disagrees: "Half the money for Balotelli comes from a sponsor. The club will have no difficulties here and we are working within our budget. We are debt-free and have a surplus of 48 million Turkish lira [around €4.7 million]."

At Galatasaray, legendary coach Fatih Terim very much continues to call the shots, his powerbase stronger than ever after Burak Elmas topped the poll in presidential elections in June. Terim, out of contact at the end of last season, had been told in no uncertain terms by Elmas' predecessor, Mustafa Cengiz, that he had no chance of an extension. As soon as Elmas was elected, Terim was swiftly reinstated, handed a new three-year deal.

Champions...Besiktas fans celebrate on the streets of Istanbul after their team's title victory

Despite Fenerbahce caretaker coach Emre Belozoglu sparking an excellent run of results in the latter stages of last term – winning seven out of ten games and losing only once – the president of the Yellow Canaries, Ali Koc, still thought it best to change the coaching guard, bringing back the Portuguese technician Vitor Pereira for a second stint at the club (he was previously in charge in 2015-16, steering them to the runners-up spot in both the Super Lig and the Turkish Cup). In Ali Koc's three years at the top, stability has been in short supply: Pereira is his seventh managerial appointment, while over 50 players have been brought in.

> The unveiling of the season's fixture list had supporters scrambling to pore over the schedule, with fans of the Istanbul "Big Three" anxious to know when the derbies would take place

Struggling... Mesut Ozil is yet to impress in Turkey

New Fenerbahce signings include the English centre-back Steven Caulker – acquired from fellow Super Lig outfit Alanyaspor – and striker Serdar Dursun, who was the leading goalscorer in the German second division last season with 27 strikes for Darmstadt.

What Fener desperately need is a fit and energised Mesut Ozil. Since arriving from Arsenal in January, the German World Cup winner has not left the launch pad, either out injured or ineffectual on the pitch.

Inspirational Besiktas coach Sergen Yalcin, who last season, his first in charge of the Black Eagles, led the club to a domestic double, eventually accepted a one-year extension after much haggling. Yalcin could afford to play hard to get, apparently an object of desire for the Turkish national team and Fenerbahce.

In a major blow for the champions, prolific Cameroon front-man Vincent Aboubakar opted to try his luck in Saudi Arabia, joining Al Nassr in Riyadh. In the wake of Aboubakar's departure, Besiktas will be relying even more on the marksmanship of the fast-improving Canadian Cyle Larin. Two new faces of note at Besiktas: veteran engine room workhorse Mehmet Topal (ex-Istanbul Basaksehir) and central midfielder Salih Ucan (Alanyaspor).

Trabzonspor went the 30-something big-name route in their transfer dealings, securing the services of the Slovak schemer Marek Hamsik (Gothenburg) and Ivory Coast winger Gervinho (Parma).

Nick Bidwell

Glenn Moore

Women's Champions League gets a revamp

New format more in line with men's equivalent, including a new anthem

It would be easy to scoff at UEFA commissioning an anthem for the revamped Women's Champions League. But there is no doubting Tony Britten's Handel adaptation has become an intrinsic part of the success of the men's competition, recognisable worldwide as the sound of the Champions League. Players and coaches talk about how, when they stand on the pitch hearing it before a game for the first time, they know they have arrived in the sport's elite club competition.

So there is emotional as well as marketing logic in creating a soundtrack for the women's competition as it moves into a new era, 20 years after it began as the UEFA Women's Cup and 12 years after rebranding as the UEFA Women's Champions League. Now, it will ape the men's competition with its own TV deal, logo and anthem. More pertinently for the clubs, it has an expanded entry from the big leagues and includes group stages. Ironically largely a reversion to the original format, this guarantees more matches and enables them to budget better and increase revenues.

For now, the expansion is limited. Unlike in the men's competition, in which Spain, England, Germany and Italy each have four direct entries into the group stage, no league has more than three clubs in the WUCL and only the holders and the title winners from Spain, France and Germany gain automatic entry into the 16-team group stage.

This year that is Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain and Bayern Munich – with last season's runners-up Chelsea also gaining direct entry as the "holders", given that Barcelona are also Spanish champions. As it happens, this quartet also made up the semi-finalists last season.

Such a small pool of automatic qualifiers (in the men's competition 26 of the 32 are direct entrants) means many major clubs face the uncertainty of the qualifiers. This includes Lyon (champions for the previous five seasons prior to dethronement at home and abroad by PSG), Wolfsburg (finalists five times in the last nine seasons), Arsenal, Manchester City, Real Madrid, Juventus and Milan.

A complex qualifying process features 14 mini-tournaments of four teams each, then a knockout round. As with the men's competition, there are parallel streams, one for league champions, one for non-champions.

Juventus are in the Champions Path, through which seven clubs reach the group stages.

The other six clubs are in the more demanding League Path from which only five can emerge. Besides the aforementioned sextet are 16 clubs including Slavia Prague, Rosengard, Levante, Hoffenheim, PSV, Celtic, Bordeaux and Brondby. The qualifying stages start on August 18.

> Now, [the Women's Champions League] will ape the men's competition with its own TV deal, logo and anthem

The team no one wants to meet in the elimination round will be Lyon. Arsenal (assuming they get past Kazakhstan's Okzhetpes and either PSV or Lokomotiv Moscow) and Real Madrid (who enter at that stage but are also un-seeded) have a one in four chance of doing so.

Should Arsenal draw Lyon that would mean reunions for Nikita Parris and Danielle van de Donk, who traded places during the summer, with Parris returning to WSL after two years and 31 goals in France. Lyon have a new coach in Sonia Bompastor, previously a highly-respected player, formerly academy director, and the first woman at their helm.

They have also signed Christiane Endler and Signe Bruun from PSG but will have to negotiate the qualifying rounds without a trio of stars – Eugenie Le Sommer, Sarah Bouhaddi and Dzenifer Marozsan – who are on loan to offshoot NWSL club OL Reign until December.

PSG are also under new management with Didier Olle-Nicole, a veteran coach of men's teams from Nice and Le Mans to Apollon Limassol and the Benin national team, taking over from Olivier Echouafni. Player recruitment began in defence with French internationals Sakina Karchaoui (Lyon) and Estelle Cascarino (Bordeaux), and Sweden's Amanda Ilestedt from Bayern.

There is also a new coach at European champions Barcelona, with Jonatan Giraldez stepping up from assistant to replace Lluis Cortes,

Revamp...the Women's UEFA Champions League trophy

Holders...Barcelona will be favourites to win the trophy again

who resigned stating: "Winning our first treble has made us extremely happy, but it has also been a very tough season... 353 days of very hard work, effort, being together...with all the conditions surrounding COVID. I don't feel I have the energy to keep leading this team."

Giraldez has sought to build on Cortes' success with a trio of shrewd signings: Spain's Irene Paredes (PSG), Norway's Ingrid Engen and Sweden's Fridolina Rolfo (both Wolfsburg). Club captain Vicky Losada has moved on to Manchester City.

Barcelona won the domestic league by 25 points last season, winning 33 of 34 games. The only team that beat them, Atletico Madrid, came fourth, missing out on Europe, but are hoping to regain their status as contenders by signing Argentina's Estefani Banini from Levante and South African Thembi Kgatlana from Eibar. Toni Duggan has returned to her first club, Everton.

The Blues have made other smart signings, among them France's Kenza Dali (West Ham), but will find it hard to break into the top three of Chelsea, Arsenal (who signed Japan's Mana Iwabuchi from Aston Villa) and Manchester City. The latter have lost US stars Sam Mewis and Rose Lavelle but signed Jamaica's Kadija Shaw as well as Losada.

Everton are more likely to overhaul Manchester United, who have issues behind the scenes after the departure of head coach Casey Stoney. Americans Tobin Heath and Christen Press have also left amid reported discontent among players at the quality of facilities and level of investment, while promising young forward Lauren James has joined Chelsea (incidentally the same club as her brother Reece).

New appointment... Lyon coach Sonia Bompastor

In Germany Bayern look capable of pulling further clear of Wolfsburg, while Juventus will be seeking a fifth straight title since formation in Italy. Former Arsenal coach Joe Montemurro, who began his career as a player with Australian club Brunswick Juventus, has taken over. For him, as with several other coaches, the main focus will be Europe.

Round-up

New role... Casey Stoney

HARVEY RETURNS TO OL REIGN

In America, Laura Harvey has returned to the helm of NWSL club OL Reign after the departure of Farid Benstiti. Englishwoman Harvey, who had been working with the US national team, was Reign coach from 2013 to 2017.

Elsewhere, Ebony Salmon, newly recruited from Bristol City, made an immediate impact for Racing Louisville by scoring within a minute of her debut. The expansion side also signed Denmark striker Nadia Nadim and former England defender Gemma Bonner.

Portland Thorns gave a debut to 15-year-old Olivia Moultrie following a court injunction staying the league's prohibition on Under-18s playing professionally.

Former England international Casey Stoney will coach 2022 expansion side San Diego with double World Cup-winning US coach Jill Ellis as president.

PROTEST IN BRAZIL

Brazilian players carried a banner reading "No to harassment" ahead of their Olympic warm-up match against Russia. This followed the suspension of national federation president Rogerio Caboclo after he was alleged to have sexually harassed a former member of staff. Several players took to social media without naming Caboclo, including Marta who said: "Saying no to harassment goes beyond words, it is about action."

Protesting... Brazil legend Marta

HISTORY-MAKER HEWITT

Debbie Hewitt, an experienced business executive, is to become the first female chair of the Football Association in its 158-year history. Hewitt will take up her post in January.

PATSON DAKA

"I'm creating the future today"

Before sealing his £23 million move to Leicester City, the Zambia striker sat down with *World Soccer* to talk about his journey so far...

How would you describe yourself as a footballer? What would you say are your best attributes?
I think my best attributes are my speed, my intelligence in reading the game and the movements that I make with and without the ball. It's also that killer instinct that I always try to improve. It's not yet perfect, but I just try to improve it every day because the final product has to be good. If I have these things, like speed and good movement, I need to finish off the good movement that I've made.

Which players did you admire or look up to when you were getting into football?
My first inspiration was my father, may his soul rest in peace. He was the person who exposed me to football because he was a player as well. I spent most of my time with him, watching his games and his training. If I wasn't in school, then I was watching football.

Apart from my father, there have been a lot of players I've looked up to. Most of them were Zambians because I wasn't yet exposed to European football, but I remember looking at players like Fernando Torres, Luis Suarez, Chicharito, looking at how I can help myself by watching what they do.

You moved to Red Bull Salzburg in 2017. How did the opportunity come about?
My agent, [Fredi] Kanoute, identified me when I was playing at the Under-17 Africa Cup in Niger in 2015. I was looking forward to coming to Europe, but I didn't expect it to happen when it did. Before I went to Austria, I had opportunities to visit clubs in other countries – Espanyol in Spain, Lille in France and Academica de Coimbra in Portugal – but it didn't work out.

I wasn't sure the chance would come again, but it did. I was with the national team in Zimbabwe, about to go to a game, when I received a phone call from my agent to say I had to go to Austria for a trial. It was an awkward moment for me because I was focusing on going to the game, but I told myself: "This is the opportunity that I have been praying for, and it's here now, so let me go and see how it works out."

Red Bull saw something special in me that the other clubs didn't see. They gave me the opportunity.

You were just a teenager when you moved to Austria. How different was life there, and did it take a while to get used to it?
When I arrived in Austria, I was alone in a foreign country – not used to the culture, to the weather. It was difficult for me to adapt, especially to the weather, because I wasn't used to the cold. But when I arrived, I was staying at the Red Bull academy. The people there who were educating us and taking care of us were really amazing. They made life so easy for me. Even if I was far away from home, I felt like I was home.

Did it help when Enock Mwepu, another young Zambian player who you know very well, joined Salzburg too?
I came and then six months or so later he came on trial. I just had to help him and to push him so that he could do his best and he could stay so we could be together! It was a really big plus for me to have not just another Zambian, but someone who I have grown up with – we've been friends since 2013 or so.

Red Bull Salzburg have had a lot of success in developing young players, and quite a few from Africa as you mentioned. Why do you think that is?
The club has a unique way of dealing with young talent. It gives opportunities to young talents, regardless of where they come from. It's easy for a young player, from Africa or wherever, because most of the players are young, so you don't have that shyness or feeling of hiding behind big players. You just have players who are trying to get better and make a big step in their careers. Everyone is hungry, everyone is pushing, so you get that extra motivation. It makes it easier for anyone to come and settle in.

It's just a good club for a player to start from: players like [Sadio] Mane, Naby Keita, [Takumi] Minamino and [Erling] Haaland have all played for Red Bull. They were all exposed to big competitions and they have ended up joining bigger clubs afterwards. It's a very good club for every young talent.

How would you describe Salzburg's philosophy and playing style?
It's very intense. You need to be clever. There is a lot of intensity, so it involves a lot of running. It's not really a club for lazy people! You need to be ready to play for the club; you have to understand the philosophy and what the coach wants.

How do you think your game has developed and improved over the time you've been at Salzburg?
When I first arrived it was difficult for me to adapt to the system. It was a very big change for me to find a team that plays with a lot of intensity, so I just tried to ask as many questions as I could. My first season wasn't very good because I was still trying to adapt to the football and also the weather – it was very difficult to play when my feet were so cold!

But because of the environment and the people, the coaches and players, they helped me develop. They always make videos to show ➤

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you what you are doing – what you are doing right, what you are doing wrong, what you have to improve on. It's really helped my game to change, because I know what I have to do when certain moments happen again.

What have you learned from your experiences of playing in the Champions League over the last couple of years?
The Champions League games are just another level. You play against top, top players who play the game more with their mind. They calculate your moves – what you're about to do and what you're thinking – so you need to be clever. You need to know where you have to be and what you have to do before you even receive the ball. Also, you need patience, because if you see how those elite players play the game, most of the time they use their mind. You find you're so excited just to play the game that you forget, and you just get lost in the moment.

It's a huge step for every player. It was a great experience and it's the kind of level that I want to play at again.

As a Liverpool supporter growing up, what was it like to play against them in the Champions League?
It was a special moment. It was a moment that I didn't think would happen in such a short period of time. Playing against them, wow, I don't know how to describe the feeling, but it was amazing! It was great. I felt more connected playing against a club that I grew up supporting. It was a great experience.

How did you find competing with a world-class defender like Virgil van Dijk?
It's not so easy. If you look at him, he is twice as big as me and so intelligent! He plays football with his mind. He calculates your next move so trying to get the best of him was really difficult, but a great experience because I came to realise that football at this level is played with intelligence. You don't just run or receive the ball however you want to. It was a special moment because I had to learn more about myself and about my game.

Champions League... the striker scored twice in last season's qualifying play-offs

Eye-catching...Daka netted twice for Zambia at the 2017 Under-20 World Cup in South Korea

What was Erling Haaland like to play alongside during your time together at Red Bull Salzburg?
It was easy to play with him because he's a great person. The relationship off the pitch was so good that it was easy on the pitch too. You're trying to work for each other; you're trying to support each other.

We all know the kind of talent that he is, the kind of abilities and qualities that he has, but the understanding we had was just amazing. He didn't have the mentality of just wanting things to happen for him – he was always there to support his team-mates and be there for the team. I think being a team player is one of his greatest abilities.

How does it feel to see what Haaland has gone on to achieve with Dortmund?
He made the right decision. What he has achieved with Dortmund so far is unbelievable. It's inspiring because it's not easy to move from one club to another and be even more than you were before. The level of the league that he's playing in has changed. To go to Dortmund and become the main man there is what every player wants when they go to another club. He understands the ability and power that he possesses, and he uses them to his advantage.

Do you hope to achieve something similar to Haaland in the future?
I wouldn't say that I want to do something

Anfield...Daka competes with Liverpool's Fabinho

> We all know the kind of talent [Haaland] is... the understanding we had was just amazing

similar because we are two different people. I think I just want to do the best that I can in the way that I can, because we possess different abilities. At the end of the day, you cannot force something that is not for you. I can only be the best version of myself, like he is being the best version of himself. You can only be inspired by someone, and learn from what they're doing.

What goals and ambitions do you have for your career?
I hope to play at the highest level for as long as I can. My biggest dream is to be a player that inspires a lot of people and give hope to the less privileged. For me, that's the biggest dream. It's not necessarily about going to play for the biggest club or to win awards, I want to use this career to inspire other people.

Zambia has never really had a global football superstar before. What would it mean for you to be able to change that?
It wouldn't just mean a lot to me, it would mean a lot to Zambia as well. I know how much my country loves football. It would be something we would celebrate together because it would take the country's name to the next level.

When I'm playing, I know I'm carrying a lot of people's hopes out there in Zambia, who are looking up to me and who are wishing for me to go far in my career.

We are looking forward to being on that stage where, when you mention Zambia, they already know about it. We want to have that moment where they immediately mention my name, or Enock's, or another player's.

It's still very early in your career, but what would you pick out as the highlight so far?
I have a lot of highlights, but I would pick winning the UEFA Youth League because it was the first time for Red Bull. It's very hard to win this trophy. I've won the [Austrian] Bundesliga, but lots of players have already done that. Players who have gone, and players who are yet to come are going to win it, but the UEFA Youth League was something special for the club because they had never won it before.

Interview by Sean Cole

Lethal strike partnership...Erling Haaland and Daka scored 40 Austrian Bundesliga goals between them in 2019-20

Team-mates... Daka alongside Enock Mwepu

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GUSTAVO POYET

"You play to win, you don't play to earn money... You need to feel it"

The Universidad Catolica coach talks basketball, derbies and the Copa Libertadores

Your father Washington was a successful basketball player. How much influence did he have on you?
He wanted to play football, but life and friends and luck took him to play basketball and he did very well. I've always had a strong relationship with basketball, it's a sport I like a lot. I played it when I was young. But he was always pushing me and my brother to play football; what he couldn't do himself he wanted his kids to do.

Being a professional sportsman, did your father instil competitiveness in you?
No doubt. And also I have to say, for a very long time he was still recognised. His popularity was bigger than mine, especially for older people. Maybe after I won the Copa America in 1995, I achieved something with the national team. Then it was like, "OK, he's not anymore the 'son of', now he's got a name for himself." But at the beginning, in every news item that came [about me] there was always a reference to my father.

Did basketball influence your football?
Every sport has something you can use in others. In basketball, the positioning when defending is pretty similar. When you're marking a man you need to see the ball, and the basket needs to be behind you; if something is not in that triangle of perfection, something is wrong.

Did the encouragement to keep on studying also come from your parents?
When I was young, the deal for me to be able to play outside on the streets was that I had to do my homework. It became a habit: get home, eat quickly and then out, football! I didn't stop until I got to university, and by then I was playing for the Under-20s national team. That's when I realised, "OK, this is serious," and I stopped in my first year. Everyone has a time and that was my time. I was playing for River Plate, in Uruguay.

I was studying engineering. I liked numbers, I liked problems. I always liked maths. I did the exams in the first year of university. I passed chemistry and I failed computers.

Do you get on with computers now? Are you a laptop manager now?
Yes, I am. I'm not an expert in many things, but I use [technology] a lot. We use an app for training, which allows us to register everything and all of the [training] data. It's a great tool.

You've spent more of your life in Europe than in Uruguay now. What Uruguayan characteristics do you carry with you, as a person and as a football manager?
There are two things that come straight into my mind. One is the passion that comes from inside – that is Uruguayan, 100 per cent. And the second is what we call the rules. You learn things in Uruguay when you're small, in football and in life, which become part of you. One very simple example: nothing comes out the dressing room, nothing! The dressing room is our house; nobody knows what is going on inside the house. I learned that when I was very young.

But obviously you go to different countries and different things happen. For example, I like to name the team the day before the game. In England that was no problem, but when I went to Greece, the team was always in the Saturday morning newspapers, because somebody from inside the team was telling everyone. So, I had to stop, as I didn't want the opposition to prepare.

Do you think there's anything in your approach to football that's Uruguayan?
The passion. Convincing the team that defeat is the worst thing that can happen; it hurts. There are three results in football: winning, drawing and losing, but that doesn't mean you accept defeat like it's part of life. No! It has to hurt, because you play to win, you don't play to earn money. No, no, you play to win. You need to feel it.

Uruguay is a small country that has consistently overachieved in football.
We know we need to make an effort bigger than the rest; we know it's going to be more difficult. I don't think many people want to compete against us, because they know we don't accept defeat as a part of our life. I always believe that one Uruguayan player in any team in the world is a great asset. We are team players. It's very rare that you find an outstanding Uruguayan player that you can say is selfish. Another thing that I think is important, is that when we go to a club, that club and our family is the most important. Which means that you become a fan of that club, you are part of that club. It gives a little bit extra.

Even players who are as good as Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani?
You can see with that example. They want to win.

You've also spent a long time in England, as a player and as a manager. What do you see as English football's characteristics?
There are three or four things that are important. One is that the fans recognise your effort. As soon as they see you're 100 per cent involved in the team, you are part of that club forever. It is not like that in other parts of the world.

The other thing that is incredible is the pace of the game – the intensity is from another world! If you're not ready for it, you won't be able to play many years there. It took a few months for me to adapt, and I suffered in the beginning. But when you get it and you go to play somewhere else, you go: "Come on! Quicker!" Everything seems slower.

You really did embrace it too. You became a classic, box-to-box English midfielder.
I was 29 years old when I arrived and I had the chance to play in Spain, nice and relaxed, renew my contract with Zaragoza and stay there forever. But something in my head said: "Football in England is perfect for you."

But when I came it was a shock. The first game was the Charity Shield with Chelsea and the first 20 minutes I couldn't get into the game [laughs]. The game was 100 miles an hour and I was two miles an hour! I remember Ruud Gullit, the coach, said to me at half-time: "Gus, you're not getting up, you're not getting down. Get on with the game." I said: "I'm trying! It's too quick."

Then you got used to it.
Well, there were many things that happened. I got injured in my first year. Even if it's a bit of a contradiction, the injury helped me. I was watching and learning the language and seeing what was needed from the inside. That's the key. Not watching from home. So when I came back the same season, I was in a better position than when I arrived in the summer of 1997.

Who were your influences as a manager?
I don't think there is the perfect manager – they all have something. Ruud, for example, had an incredible way of dealing with pressure. For him, it was 100 per cent football in the morning. Then the rest of the day, it's life. I couldn't believe it in the beginning. I thought: "I'm football 24/7". But he's got a point, you are crazy if you are 24/7 all the time; you have to separate football from life.

What does a perfect Gus Poyet team look like? What characteristics would it have?
I think the team that represents me has to respect the football, first. Be really organised, have passion and a winning mentality.

I think I achieved that in most places. Brighton was the best, without any doubt. Sunderland was the one with the biggest repercussion worldwide because it was the Premier League. That was amazing. And then AEK Athens and Bordeaux, I had really good results, especially in derbies.

Derby specialist... Poyet celebrates beating Newcastle

You're a derby specialist: at Sunderland you won three derbies against Newcastle.
Before I went to Sunderland I thought I would manage Newcastle one day. Their fans wanted to hate me because I always scored against them. But at the same time, they were thinking: "Why not have him with us?" When you cannot beat your opposition, join. That was my thinking. Then I went to Sunderland, which was a problem for Newcastle fans, and on top of that, I played three times and I beat them three times. It doesn't help. It's like Uruguayan football. You make the players understand how important that [derby] game is and the result has to be only one: winning.

You won the big derbies in Athens as well.
Three. I call it three because at that time there was Olympiakos, Panathinaikos, AEK and PAOK that were playing for the league and I won all three in a month and a half, 1-0, 1-0, 1-0. The most important was Olympiakos, because they were unbeaten and were going to win the league unbeaten. The fans were telling me: "Don't let them win unbeaten." And when we did it, it was massive. I'm sure I will work again in Greece.

What were those atmospheres like?
Wow! My first game, I'll tell you what happened. I got the job on Thursday, the team played the day before, so I met the players on Friday and warmed down and nothing else, then Saturday we did a little bit of training. On Sunday it was Panathinaikos-AEK, away derby in Athens. I remember people from the club saying: "If you want you can sit in the directors' box and watch the game." I said: "No chance, I'm going down there. I'm not missing this derby." And it was unbelievable! I've never been in a place like that. There were so many flares. And so much smoke that we couldn't start the game for five or six minutes. I couldn't see anyone!

When you left Sunderland, you made a conscious decision to go abroad. Why?
I wanted to get out of England because when you are there, you only focus on English football. So I said: "It would be nice to see something different." And to be honest my idea was to get out and come back. Incredibly, I went from Greece to Spain to China to France. I wanted to come back. People were calling me from other countries, I was saying: "No. No. No." But after a year and two, three months, I thought I needed to open up again to the world.

Tell us about you time in China. Why

Charity Shield... Poyet competes with Roy Keane on his Chelsea debut

did you go to Shanghai Shenhua?
It was the timing. It was two weeks after I finished in Spain [with Real Betis]. I had doubts; I was not convinced that it was the right move. But after talking to my staff, we all decided to go together. In football it wasn't great, but the experience, personally, was magnificent. I wouldn't change my decision at all. It was a massive life experience. They are so different to us. A different way of understanding life and playing sports.

What shocked you culturally?
They believe in luck more than in Europe. A lot. They are strong believers in luck, or how you can help luck with numbers, colours, or different things. Until you are there you don't realise how important it is for them. Then the way of living, the cities, the quantity of people. Anything you do is hundreds and hundreds of people in the street, in the lobbies, in the lift, everywhere you go. There are people everywhere. In the beginning it shocks you. I had to stay a couple of months over there after I finished my contract, to see China. I had a great personal experience.

A lot was said about Carlos Tevez's time with you at Shanghai. What is your recollection of that time with him and his performances?
My feeling is that he thought he was going – and I did as well – to a team that was better than the one he found. I thought we would be able to win the league. He went with that mentality and it was something different. It wasn't as we thought it would be. I think that coming from big teams where he's used to winning, it was a bit of a shock.

And he was unlucky, because when he was at his best, he got injured. It took him time to come back, and when he came back, we decided that he needed to play to get back to his best and not just wait. So, I started playing him and he was not 100 per cent. He played an incredible game against Beijing Guoan, that we won at home, but three days later he got injured again in the same calf. He was out for a long time, and then I left.

It was a disappointment and then, I always say, when you are not happy, you get injured. But it was good to meet him and know him as a person.

You spent some time away from football before joining Universidad. Did you miss it?
I missed the relationship with the players. When it works, the consequences of that relationship with those players, when you stay in touch with them for life and you meet them somewhere and they remember something that you did together, there is no better feeling. When you win it's magnificent. But when you can't win because you are not in the top teams, the best you can have is feelings from players and fans. When I meet Sunderland fans, they remember the wins or the [2014 League Cup] final. That's what football is all about.

> "The game was 100 miles an hour and I was two miles an hour!"

Why did you choose Universidad Catolica?
When I left Bordeaux, my first idea was to get back to England. But after being in England for a year and not getting the job I wanted, I opened myself to the whole world again. When I came back to Uruguay I wanted to do a few things in football and people were telling me: "No, it's not possible." During the [Catolica] interview, I really liked the people and the opportunity. And because this team had won the last three league titles [in Chile] and had the possibility of playing international games [in the Copa Libertadores], I thought it was a good chance to prove that personal challenge in a very good place.

Do you feel the club provides the right structure for you to achieve your aims?
Well, yes. My friends said: "Why do you go there? They've been champions for the last three years, you've got nothing else to achieve." But there are always things to achieve. First was the supercup. Right or wrong, it's a final and you need to win it. It was a big derby against Colo-Colo and we won. And the second is the international games. It's the first time in ten years that Catolica have gone past the group stage [of the Libertadores]. So far, results wise it's been very good because everything that was asked, we've been able to deliver. The most important one obviously is to win the championship and make it four in a row – it would be the first time in Catolica's history.

How much of an achievement is progressing to the knockout stages of the Libertadores?
Colo-Colo won the Copa Libertadores in 1991 and Catolica never. That shows you how difficult it is to get through. Then there is the financial side. The Argentinian and Brazilian teams have plenty of power, financially. And even on top of that, at the beginning of the Libertadores, there were seven Argentinian teams and eight Brazilian teams. It makes no sense, I don't think it's fair. In our group we won three and lost three, but we went through, which is a great achievement.

And what was the final group game like against Atletico Nacional of Colombia?
It was like a final. When we arrived in the stadium one of the players had a temperature so we sent him home. I didn't have a right-back because my other right-back tested positive. So, we had to change the team shape an hour before the game. There was a bit of tension. Luckily it worked. It was magnificent.

Interview by Joshua Law

Argumentative...Poyet clashes with the referee during the Copa Libertadores group stage

ADAM LE FONDRE

"Goals where I sniff out a chance are like my pay cheque"

Three years ago Adam Le Fondre was a Bolton Wanderers outcast; now he's a goalscoring legend on the other side of the world. Here, the former Reading striker tells *World Soccer* about his remarkable journey and how to be a poacher…

You've scored more than 250 goals in your career so far – from League Two to the Premier League in England, and now in Australia and India. What does it take to be a consistent goalscorer?
I guess a bit of luck and hard work. From six or seven years old, I've pretty much dedicated my life to football, and always tried to improve. I'm no different now as I get to 35. I want to keep improving. I've spent a lot of time working on finishing and watching the best strikers in the world, seeing what sort of positions they take up and how that can help me as a player. Luckily, I've managed to stay fit as well, which is very rare in football. I've managed to keep myself away from a lot of bad injuries.

You've often said how much you enjoy scoring a poacher's goal – why is that?
I would much rather score a tap-in from two yards, following in off a keeper, than score from 30 yards. It's just me as a striker. I think those sorts of goals are my bread and butter. The ones from outside the box are few and far between but, for a striker like me, those goals where I sniff out a chance are like my pay cheque. Following in, nicking in front of the defender, or just getting a little touch on something – those are the goals I really pride myself on. I love scoring them because they tend to be important.

Having spent your whole career in English football, how did the opportunity come about to play in Australia and what motivated you to take it?
I'd played in England for 14, 15 seasons and I'd just come off a decent end of the season with Bolton, where we stayed up on the last day. Prior to that I was really contemplating what I was going to do because I just felt a bit stale. I felt like football had probably got the better of me mentally.

An opportunity came up that summer to go to Australia. I was discussing with my wife what we should do, because it was such a life-changing opportunity. In the end, we jumped at it and that was a great decision because it really reinvigorated me. It gave me a new lease of life in football and a new enthusiasm. It took me to places I wouldn't even think of going. I went and played in Korea, Japan and China – it was fantastic. It really whetted my appetite for more football, whereas I was sort of disillusioned in England.

What was the cause of that disillusionment, do you think?
I wasn't playing as much as I would have liked, and I still felt I was good enough to contribute. I wasn't getting the opportunity. It's disheartening as a footballer, when your team's losing, you're a goalscorer and you're not getting the chance to help the team. It just became a bit much for me. I got into a rut. I was probably taking whatever disappointment and negative attitude I had from not playing football home with me, and it's not nice for my kids and my wife to be around. It was vital I changed that mindset.

Did you know much about Sydney FC and the A-League before you went out there?
Not particularly, no. I spoke to a friend of mine, Adam Federici. He was playing in England at the time, but he's in Australia now. He spoke in glowing terms about how good the league is and what I could expect for my family. It gave me a really good insight into what I was letting myself in for.

How does the standard and style of football in Australia compare to what you were used to in England?
In Australia, it's very much a counter-attacking game, but they do try to build up from the back. It's a little bit more cultured in the way they play out from the back than it is in England. But it's similar, because English football's transitional as well. That suited me down to the ground because I love playing on the break and getting in the box.

The standard's better than I thought it was going to be. I'd say a few of the teams would probably be around Championship level and a few were the top end of League One.

SYDNEY FC
9
amber

What was it like to have so much success in your first couple of seasons at Sydney, both individually and as a team?
It was amazing. I'd sacrificed so much for my family and to win three out of the four trophies that we could have won was full vindication of everything I'd done. I joined a great team who had had a lot of success prior to me joining. I jumped in and we carried on where they left off. The club were really welcoming, and helped me and my family settle really fast, which was a big thing.

On top of winning domestic titles, did you enjoy competing in the AFC Champions League?
It was brilliant. It was really eye-opening as well, travelling across to play in different countries. We didn't disgrace ourselves and we were probably a little bit hard done by because we definitely should have qualified in the first year. Obviously COVID interrupted last season as well. It was a great experience playing against the likes of Hulk and Oscar in the Champions League. We certainly left our stamp on it, but we just couldn't quite get the right results.

How did you get the chance to go on loan to Mumbai City towards the end of last year and what appealed to you about it?
When COVID hit, the A-League was a bit unstable. With me having three children and a wife to support, we came to an agreement with the club that they would help me move on. The City Football Group came in with Mumbai City and said they'd love to have me over. I was really interested in that because obviously it's something completely different to what I've been used to. I thought: "Why not?" I never really looked back.

How would you assess your experience of playing in India as a whole?
I really enjoyed it. Considering it was in a bubble, and I wasn't allowed to experience too much outside of that, the football was really enjoyable. India have some talented young players and they're going in the right direction with their

AFC Champions League...Le Fondre scored twice in the 2019 group stage

infrastructure. In a few years, they should have a really decent crop. It was a step down on the A-League, and England as well, so there's still a way to go in improving that, but it was a very fun league to play in.

Historically, India doesn't have the biggest football pedigree, but could you see the foundations for future success out there?
Most definitely. There were some good young players in the league. I think in the next five to ten years they'll have some really good players coming through. Big teams are going over there now. The City Football Group and RB Leipzig are involved. Rangers and FC Basel have links with a couple of the clubs. There are some big teams trying to get their hooks in. Once they get some academies up and running, it will only get better as a nation and as a league.

You were only with Mumbai for a few months, but what did it mean to win the Indian Super League title and the play-offs during your time there?
To make history with Mumbai was amazing. We won both trophies, which they'd never done before, and I don't think anyone has in the same season. It was a great personal achievement, and also a great achievement for the club as well. That's what I was signed to do. It was just a shame we couldn't share it with the fans.

India is famous for the atmosphere that supporters generate at big matches. Was it disappointing not to be able to experience that because of coronavirus?
Definitely. I think fans make football. There's nothing better than scoring a winner and celebrating with the fans. Who doesn't want to do that? But what can you do when you're living in the world that we're living in at the moment with COVID? Beggars can't be choosers. We were just happy that the tournament went ahead, and we managed to win it. If we shared the moments on Twitter or Instagram or whatever, then so be it, that's what we had to do.

> The [A-League] standard's better than I thought it was going to be. I'd say a few of the teams would probably be around Championship level

What are the biggest things you've learned from playing abroad in recent years?
You've got to go to these places with your eyes wide open and accept the culture of the team and the place you're joining. If you do that, then you're invariably going to be successful. I think I did that in both places. I accepted the team culture and threw myself into it wholeheartedly. When the players accept you, that's how you get the best out of it.

No league is the same. You have to learn the way the team plays, and hope they play in a way that suits you. I've been quite lucky in both instances. I've played for two teams that really suit the way I play, and we've reaped the benefits of that. I've scored goals for both and been the leading scorer in their championship runs, so I've adjusted well.

Trophy-laden... the striker had a successful loan at Mumbai City

Credit: Instagram @a1f1e9

Golden Boot...Adam Le Fondre was Sydney FC's top goalscorer in each of his first two seasons at the club

You turn 35 later this year. How long are you planning to keep playing for, and what do you hope to achieve in the rest of your career?
I want to keep scoring goals and winning trophies. That's the main aim. I'd like to try to get to 300 goals, but that's something for the future. I don't know how long my body's got, but I feel really good at the moment. I've been quite lucky with avoiding injuries, so who knows how long I'll play for. But it's the best game in the world, and I love playing it, so I'm going to try to go for as long as I can.

You recently signed a new contract with Sydney, which runs until December 2023. Is it your intention to see out your career in Australia?
I'll never say never, but that's the plan, yes. I've got a few targets that I would like to get to, like the all-time leading goalscorer for Sydney. That's well in my sights. I'd like to leave here with a legacy.

Are you interested in becoming a coach or manager in the future?
I like the idea of player development, working with the Under-23s. That's a pathway I could see myself in. Or even helping young strikers, being a mentor. Having someone like me to bounce off is something I would have loved as a young striker. I'm hoping that, with my experience, I can give back to young players and help them become better.

Interview by Sean Cole

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CONCACAF...Champions League semi-finalists decided

The month in numbers

The facts and stats that have caught our eye in the world of football this month...

1

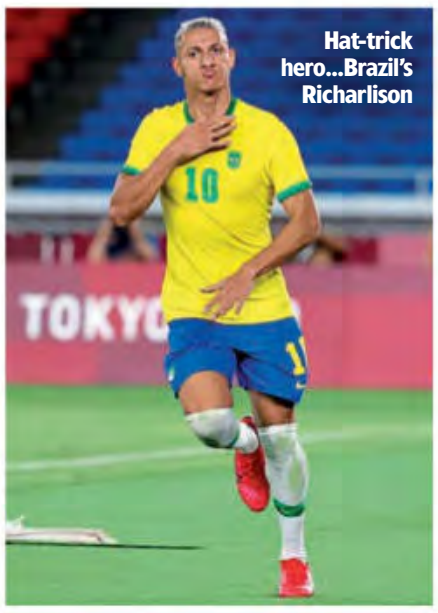
Zambia women's captain Barbra Banda became the first female African player to score an Olympics hat-trick – although it came in her side's crushing 10-3 defeat to Netherlands.

£57,000

The price paid for a football rulebook, dating back to 1859, which was sold at a recent auction.

30

The number of minutes it took Everton's Richarlison to score a hat-trick in Brazil's Olympic opener against Germany.


Hat-trick hero...Brazil's Richarlison

1

Richarlison was also the first-ever Premier League player to score a treble at the Olympics.

35

Age of France ace Andre-Pierre Gignac when he scored his first-ever international tournament goal.

3

Three Russian players – Ivan Knyazev, Daria Meshcheryakova and Vladimir Obukhov – have been given doping bans by FIFA.

50%

The pay cut that Lionel Messi agreed to in order to stay at Barcelona, agreeing a new five-year deal.

25,000

Number of fans that will be allowed inside German stadiums when the new season gets underway.

2023

The year Turkey's Ataturk Stadium will finally host the Champions League final after it was moved from Istanbul to Lisbon in 2020 and then again to Porto in 2021 due to coronavirus pandemic.

6

The number of consecutive Major League Soccer defeats Inter Miami suffered under Phil Neville after being hammered 5-0 at home by New England Revolution.

44

The US Women's team's shock 3-0 defeat to Sweden in the first game of the Olympics ended their 44-game unbeaten run.

Exhausted... Spain's Pedri

66

Games played in 2020-21 by Spain midfielder Pedri after he started his country's first match at the Tokyo Olympics.

4

Number of years Heung-min Son has committed to Tottenham Hotspur after signing a new deal with the North London club.

21.2m

The number of likes Lionel Messi's picture of him holding the Copa America trophy got on Instagram – the most ever likes for a post by an athlete.

Shock...Sweden's Stina Blackstenius celebrates scoring against USA

10

After signing a new long-term deal at the club, 20-year-old attacking midfielder Emile Smith Rowe has been handed the No.10 shirt at Arsenal – previously worn by the likes of Dennis Bergkamp, Robin van Persie and Mesut Ozil.

7

Number of positive COVID-19 tests in the Curacao squad that forced the team to withdraw from the 2021 CONCACAF Gold Cup at the very last minute.

Gutted... Curacao coach Patrick Kluivert

1

Premier League new boys Watford are the first club to have their new shirt sponsorship paid with cryptocurrency in what they claim is a club-record deal.

Cambodia

STEVE MENARY

A tough balancing act

Japanese legend Keisuke Honda is attempting to combine playing, coaching and ownership all at the same time

In charge... Honda arrived in Cambodia in 2018

Coaching the Cambodia national team, owning a club in the domestic top flight while also still playing thousands of miles away in Europe is proving a difficult balancing act for Keisuke Honda.

The Japanese legend had his contract with Portuguese side Portimonense ripped up after five days in February but moved to Azerbaijan, where he won the league with Neftci Baku. But back in Cambodia, Honda is having less success.

Cambodia were thrashed 10-0 by Iran in June and a month later his club side Soltilo Angkor let their English coach Charlie Pomroy go amidst an unseemly row over changing priorities.

"Zero wins out of five doesn't look good," says Pomroy. "But I was told we had a three-year development plan. Then, three weeks before the league started I was told we had to be title challengers with the youngest squad in the league."

Some foreign players in the C-League, which has been badly disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic, earn up to US$6,000-a-month, but Siem Reap-based Angkor have the lowest budget in the league.

Pomroy claims that Cameroonian forward Yannick Francois was the only one of the club's five overseas players that he was allowed to choose, with the rest sent over from Honda's Soltilo academy network in Japan.

> The twin ambitions of developing players for the national team and from Honda's Soltilo academy network do not appear to be working in Cambodia

The remainder of the squad are young Khmer players, mainly from Pomroy's own academy in Cambodia. Angkor had conceded 21 goals and scored twice when the owners pulled the plug on the manager, who cut a frustrated figure on the touchlines, often railing against refereeing decisions.

Soltilo Angkor barely rate a mention in the C-League but Cambodia are due to host the South East Asia Games in 2023 and the Englishman says he was originally charged with developing players to represent the country in that tournament in two years' time.

"They asked me to build a house then changed the time limit, gave me bricks and tools I didn't want then got angry with me when I didn't build the house they wanted," says Pomroy.

The twin ambitions of developing players for the national team and from Honda's Soltilo academy network do not appear to be working in Cambodia, but the Japanese legend is having more success elsewhere.

His Soltilo group is a soccer management company with over 3,000 students in the USA, Australia, Cambodia, China, Japan and Uganda. To give players opportunities, Soltilo invested in Angkor and in 2017 bought into Orange County Soccer Club of the United Soccer League, and also took a majority stake in Bright Stars of Uganda.

Bright Stars had sought to develop young players since starting out in 1997. "Our strategy had the same ideas as Soltilo," says Hussein Ahmed, one of the local shareholders who retained a minority stake after Honda took control.

Bright Stars were cup finalists in 2019 and fifth in the last Ugandan league despite having to leave their base in Kawempe due to a lack of a suitable stadium and play 20 kilometres away at Kavumba Recreation Ground.

There are no Japanese players at Bright Stars yet but Soltilo plans to open another academy in the country as Honda looks to strengthen his multi-club ownership group from the ground up before he calls time on his playing career.

Coaches...Honda on duty with Cambodia (L) and Charlie Pomroy at Soltilo Angkor (R) before leaving

South America

TIM VICKERY

Copa Libertadores update

Quarter-finals set to begin, with Brazilian clubs making up half of the final eight

The quarter-finalists of the Copa Libertadores were defined at a time that was extraordinarily favourable to the Brazilian teams: in mid-July, straight after the Copa America when everyone else was in or just coming out of pre-season, while the Brazilians were in full competitive flow. Absurdly, Brazilian football is being rewarded for having a calendar that pays no heed to FIFA dates.

Had Internacional not surprisingly fallen on penalties to Olimpia of Paraguay, then there could have been six Brazilians in the last eight. As it is, there are four and the near certainty of five – Fluminense's second leg with Cerro Porteno of Paraguay was put back to August 3 after the tragic death of the son of the Paraguayans' coach. But with Fluminense at home and with a two-goal advantage, they would seem to have a foot and a half in the quarter-finals.

Their opponents are the most exotic team left in the field – Barcelona of Ecuador, the lone representatives from the north of the continent. Under Fabian Bustos they are an attractive side that use the full dimensions of the pitch. Unlike other sides from that part of South America, they do not have the advantage of altitude – they are from the port of Guayaquil – yet have reached the last eight for the second time since the tournament changed to its year-long format in 2017 – the first team from outside Brazil and Argentina to do so. They have a fine recent record against Brazilian opposition too, beating Santos home and away in relative comfort in this year's group phase. The key question will be whether they can defend against Fluminense in this meeting of the only teams left standing that have yet to win the competition.

Upset...Olimpia players celebrate after their penalty shootout victory over Internacional

Revitalised...Hulk in action against Boca Juniors

Vitinho...the in-form Flamengo striker scored a brace in the last 16 against Defensa y Justicia

In the same half of the draw are Fluminense's historic rivals Flamengo, winners in 2019 and right among the favourites this time – especially in their match up with Olimpia. The Paraguayans are resilient, especially since coach Sergio Orteman lowered the age of his side. Beaten 6-1 by Internacional in the group phase, they played out two goalless draws against the same opponents in the knockout stages, where they were the better side at home and hung on grimly away. But Flamengo give them much more to hang on against. Now coached by Renato Portaluppi, Flamengo have yet to find a satisfactory replacement for Arsenal centre-back Pablo Mari, and can be vulnerable. But the depth of their attacking resources is frightening, and they should have too much for Olimpia.

The stand-out glamour tie is the Brazil-Argentina clash between Atletico Mineiro and River Plate

The stand-out glamour tie is the Brazil-Argentina clash between Atletico Mineiro and River Plate. Atletico were deeply disappointing in their controversial elimination of Boca Juniors (on a penalty shootout after two goalless draws) but are flying in the Brazilian Championship, with Hulk re-inventing himself so well as a centre-forward that there have even been calls for him to be brought back to the national team.

As always in the seven-year reign of Marcelo Gallardo, River are easy on the eye and full of little variations, with striker Braian Romero an interesting new addition. And by mid-August they should have had the time to play themselves into form and full match fitness. Players have come and gone in Gallardo's time in charge. But, with just ten goals in eight games in this year's competition, there is one stalwart that they have struggled to replace: classy and intelligent left-footed playmaker Ignacio Fernandez, who left them at the start of the year – to join Atletico Mineiro. This move is emblematic of the financial firepower of the Brazilian clubs; with improved scouting they are buying in talent from around the continent.

In the all-Brazilian battle between local rivals Palmeiras and Sao Paulo, both coaches are imports. Reigning champions Palmeiras have Abel Ferreira from Portugal, while Sao Paulo are led by Argentina's Hernan Crespo, who guided Defensa y Justicia to the Copa Sudamericana – South America's secondary club competition – last season.

Earlier this year the sides met in the regional Sao Paulo final, with Crespo's men coming out on top. As their first title in some years, that was an important moment for Sao Paulo. But the stakes are far higher now, and Palmeiras, with their relentless efficiency, will go into the clash as narrow favourites. Their triumphs in the 1990s mean that Sao Paulo have a special relationship with the Libertadores. But Palmeiras are the holders, and it will not be easy to rip the crown away from them. These matches may not be pretty, but they will surely be dramatic as the Libertadores moves towards the certainty of having at least one Brazilian semi-finalist – and the possibility of having all four.

Barcelona...Byron Castillo rides a tackle

CONCACAF Champions League

MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER

Champions League update

Mexican dominance set to continue with three semi-finalists from LigaMX

It seemed that maybe this time, it was going to be different. But in the end, history repeated itself once more. For the past 15 years, Mexican clubs have dominated the CONCACAF Champions League. Since Saprissa of Costa Rica won it in 2005, nobody has been able to challenge the supremacy of the Aztec sides.

Nevertheless, Major League Soccer teams have gone close on several occasions, and the 2021 edition seemed a good opportunity to finally break the cycle – although more because of the problems of Mexican clubs than because of their own strength. In this tournament, Mexico had four teams, and they all had reason to doubt their title credentials.

Santiago Banos, football director of the giants Club America, pointed out before the first game that the tournament "doesn't give Mexican sides any benefit in general". Cruz Azul were completely focused on the local league, which had resisted them for 24 years, Monterrey had experienced a recent managerial change, with the return of veteran Javier Aguirre to Mexican shores after 19 years abroad, in the place of Antonio Mohamed, while Leon, the previous Mexican champions, have a peculiar habit of underperforming in international competitions.

And the round of 16 seemed to confirm the apparent Aztec weakness. Leon, true to form, were eliminated at the first exchange by a Toronto FC side full of subs and plagued with injuries. Cruz Azul used their reserve side in their tie against the Haitians of Arcahaie, and could barely salvage a 0-0 draw in

Favourites...Cruz Azul forward Brayan Angulo (L) struck three goals in the quarters

Monterrey...Maximiliano Meza scored twice against Columbus Crew

the first leg, played on neutral grounds in the Dominican Republic, although in the end they advanced with an emphatic 8-0 win in the return leg in the Azteca Stadium.

America did even worse, losing 1-0 at home to Honduras' Olimpia in a terrible game, full of fouls, but advanced anyway thanks to their 2-1 win in Tegucigalpa a week earlier. Only Monterrey had a field day in their tie, albeit against the modest Dominican Republic team Atletico Pantoja.

For their part, all of the remaining MLS teams advanced smoothly. Portland Timbers, Columbus Crew and Philadelphia Union thrashed their Central American rivals, while Atlanta United suffered a bit more in a 2-0 aggregate win against Alajuelense, but managed to advance nonetheless.

With five representatives against three of their arch-rivals, the United States' fans could feel optimistic about the quarter-finals, but it was then when Mexican teams decided to take the competition seriously, and the waters returned to the course of the past.

Cruz Azul, using all their starters, all but decided their tie against Toronto in the first leg, winning 3-1 in Canada.

Since Saprissa of Costa Rica won the CONCACAF Champions League in 2005, nobody has been able to challenge the supremacy of the Aztec sides

Monterrey suffered a little more in their match in Columbus, rescuing a 2-2 draw in the last minute, before winning the second leg 3-0. America were similarly dominant against Portland, with a 4-2 aggregate victory. Only Philadelphia made it through, beating another MLS team, Atlanta.

Despite the three-month hiatus between the quarter-finals and semi-finals (due to commence in August), it seems unlikely that the trend of Mexican dominance will be reversed. Cruz Azul finally broke their national title drought and, with a squad full of Mexican and South American internationals, will now focus on continental glory. Monterrey repatriated Mexican international Hector Moreno to shore up their defence, and America, although not making notable changes to their squad, possess one of the most expensive and powerful teams on the continent.

Philadelphia Union got off to a good start to the MLS season, but it only takes a glance at their squad to see that they are not on the same level as their semi-final rivals, America, who boast names like legendary Mexican goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa and South American internationals Pedro Aquino (Peru), Richard Sanchez (Paraguay), Roger Martinez and Nicolas Benedetti (Colombia).

In past editions, MLS clubs always cited the calendar as one of the reasons for their poor results. The tournament used to be played in the first half of the year, with the LigaMX season well advanced and MLS' just beginning. This time it will be the complete opposite, so Philadelphia will at least have that going for them, but it doesn't seem like enough of an advantage against the quality difference over its rivals.

So no one should be surprised if, in a few months, history will repeat itself and a Mexican side lifts the trophy for the 16th consecutive time.

Star-studded... Club America

Top scorer... Philadelphia Union's Kacper Przybylko has five goals

CAF Champions League

MARK GLEESON

Al Ahly win their tenth Champions League title

Final proves to be a step too far for South African underdogs Kaizer Chiefs

In the end the fairy tale had a horror ending, but Kaizer Chiefs' ride to the African Champions League final was among the most remarkable stories in the continental club competition for years.

They eventually lost to a polished Al Ahly, who continued to break new ground as they completed "*Al Ashra*" – their tenth success in the competition, in the Arabic equivalent of Real Madrid's "*Decima*".

The final proved a one-sided affair, with the Egyptians beating Chiefs 3-0 in Casablanca to enforce their superiority in the African game and add another chapter to an already illustrious history.

It was always going to be a tough assignment for the Soweto club, and their slim chances were reduced to virtually nothing when they had Happy Mashiane sent off just before half-time.

Winner...coach Pitso Mosimane lifts his third CAF Champions League trophy

He made a ridiculous challenge inside Al Ahly's half on an opponent's ankle that the referee first cautioned him for, but then after being encouraged to review it, changed the colour from yellow to red.

It saw Chiefs overwhelmed in the second half as Mohamed Sherif, Magdi Afsha and Amr El-Sulaya scored for the Cairo club to ensure an emphatic win that might have been even more one-sided had Al Ahly not taken their foot off the gas in the closing stages.

But despite the calamity of the final, Chiefs made a real success story of the 2020-21 competition. The Soweto club have been the best-supported team in South Africa over the last half-century and are a lucrative domestic brand, but their reach had never extended further than the southern African region.

This was the first time they had even got into the group phase of the Champions League, never mind all the way to the final, and came on the back of a calamitous domestic season.

It all started last campaign. Chiefs entered the belated final stages, played out in a bio-bubble in Johannesburg, with a significant lead over their rivals, but departed some four weeks later having blown their title chances on the last day. The disappointment extended their trophyless run to five seasons after decades of dominance.

Then came a one-year transfer ban for a botched deal involving Madagascar midfielder Arohasina Andrianarimanana, who in the end could hardly crack the first team, and a change of coach. But Gavin Hunt, who'd previously won four South Africa championships with two different clubs, proved ill-fitted and the club limped along in the nether regions of the league. Yet at the same time, they continued to make surprise progress through the Champions League, albeit with several fortunate twists and turns.

Hunt was eventually fired two games from the end of the league season (as Chiefs looked set to finish lower than they had ever before) and on the eve of the Champions League semi-final against Wydad Casablanca of Morocco. They parachuted in former coach Stuart Baxter and he was able to affect an eighth-place finish in the league and see the club through a dramatic "smash-and-grab" semi-final win over the much more fancied Wydad.

It really was thief in the night stuff as Chiefs caught Wydad with a counter punch away in the first leg in Casablanca through Serbian striker Sami Nurkovic, then defended as if their lives depended on it to take a 1-0 lead into the second leg a week later. In Johannesburg, they were even more on the back foot but somehow survived a goalless draw, reaching the final against all odds.

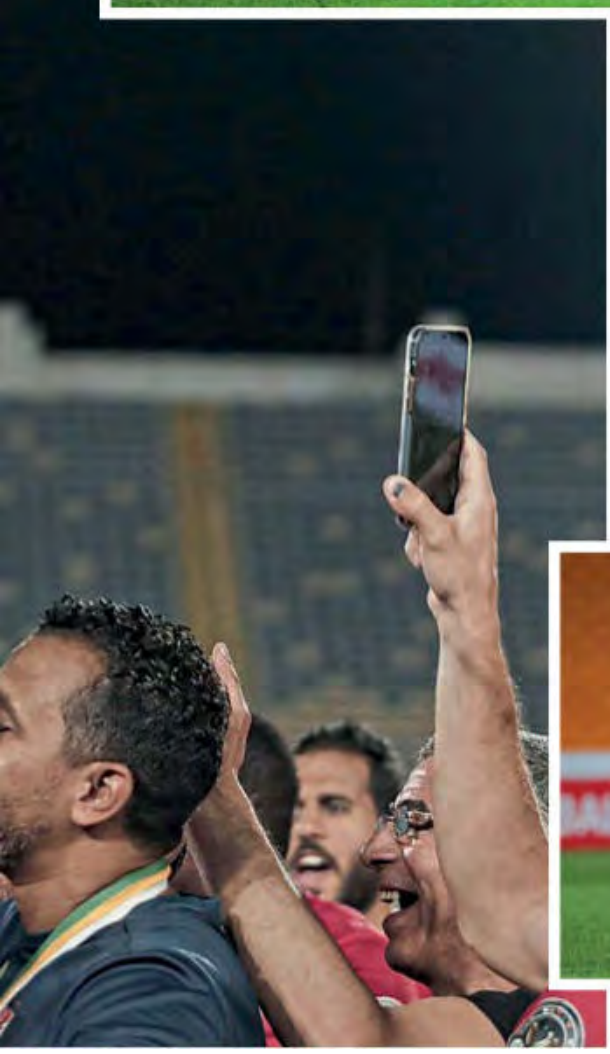
At the same time, Al Ahly were winning both home and away against Esperance of Tunisia for a comprehensive 4-0 aggregate success that underlined their prowess and the massive task that Chiefs would face in the final.

Baxter, seeking to become only the second Briton after Richie Barker (Zamalek 1986) to take a club to African Champions League success, had warned that Al Ahly's winning mentality and direct approach would be hard to counter but that any team who had made it to a final had to believe they had a chance.

But Chiefs showed few signs of self-belief and once the initially cautions Egyptians started upping the tempo, the gulf in class quickly became evident. Al Ahly were patient once they had the one-man advantage but then came a trio of well taken goals to bring home yet another continental title. They are in line to chase another milestone in the African game: no club has ever won the Champions League three times in a row, but next May the Egyptians might change that too.

Clash...the final proved to be a feisty encounter
Credit: Kaizer Chiefs

Despite the calamity of the final, Chiefs made a real success story of the 2020-21 competition



Underdogs...Kaizer Chiefs' Eric Mathoho celebrates his team's semi-final victory

***Al Ashra*...Al Ahly's players had their sights set on a tenth Champions League crown after their semi-final victory over Esperance of Tunisia**

Australia

SIMON HILL

Review

Melbourne City claim first A-League title

Club owned by City Football Group overcome a number of challenges to lift trophy

Seven years ago, the City Football Group acquired Melbourne Heart as part of its burgeoning global portfolio of clubs. A-League watchers anticipated an upsurge in the then-struggling Heart, and an immediate injection of funding that would lift the competition as a whole.

Safe to say what followed was more of a slow build than a quick fix. Despite the renamed Melbourne City dabbling in high-profile signings such as David Villa and Tim Cahill, and the construction of a new $20 million training complex in the suburb of Bundoora, success proved elusive.

One FFA Cup win in 2016 and a series of near misses was all that the club had to show. Until this season that is, when, after an ordinary start to the campaign, they came good to finish top of the table for the first time.

In the finals, a team often accused of lacking resilience overcame a series of obstacles to lift their inaugural championship. First, the Asian World Cup qualifiers deprived them of three key players – Curtis Good, Connor Metcalfe and Golden Boot winner, Jamie Maclaren – who were all selected for Australia, and then had to go into quarantine on their return.

Then, despite securing home advantage, their semi-final was shifted from Melbourne to Sydney due to a mini-COVID outbreak in Victoria. City also lost experienced attackers Andrew Nabbout and Craig Noone to injury. But youngsters Stefan Colakovski, who attended Heart's first-ever game as a fan, and Marco Tilio, stepped up to the plate, scoring the goals to see off

Turning point...Luke Brattan is shown a first-half red card

Macarthur, to book a home Grand Final against reigning champions, Sydney FC.

Although Steve Corica's team took the lead through Kosta Barbarouses, City equalised immediately through Nathaniel Atkinson. Luke Brattan's dismissal on 35 minutes left Sydney in deep trouble, and City duly capitalised, with skipper Scott Jamieson (penalty) and Scott Galloway sealing a 3-1 win in front of a restricted 14,000-crowd at AAMI Park.

A team often accused of lacking resilience overcame a series of obstacles to lift their inaugural championship

Equaliser...Nathaniel Atkinson celebrates after scoring for City

This could be the first step towards an era of dominance similar to City's parent club in Manchester. Already, Kisnorbo has acquired Socceroo Mat Leckie from Hertha Berlin, retained fellow international Maclaren for a further two years, and re-engaged Nabbout, who was Australia's No.9 at the World Cup in Russia.

Sydney FC came close to achieving an historic third consecutive title, but ultimately they were no match for City's energy on the big day, even allowing for Brattan's dismissal. Brazilian forward Bobo and ex-Premier League striker Adam Le Fondre both returned to the Sky Blues midway through the campaign to provide the goals they were missing, bagging 16 between them. Yet they are in their mid-30s, as are several other members of the squad, and Steve Corica may have to partially rebuild.

Central Coast Mariners finished in third place – remarkable, given they had "won" the last three wooden spoons. But coach Alen Stajcic quit at the season's end and young star Alou Kuol departed for Stuttgart, leaving a big question mark as to whether they'll be able to repeat that next season.

Brisbane Roar ended a creditable fourth, but went out in the Elimination Semi. Japanese import Riku Danzaki proved to be a great acquisition, netting nine goals, and coach Warren Moon will hope to retain the midfielder on another one-year loan from Consadole Sapporo.

Adelaide United finished fifth in Carl Veart's debut season, with Craig Goodwin's return helping to propel them into the top six. But Goodwin suffered an injury ahead of the finals, and his absence was felt keenly as they lost out to Sydney FC in the semis.

Macarthur made the finals in their debut season – with veterans Adam Federici, Matt Derbyshire and the retiring Mark Milligan, the last of the Socceroos' "Golden Generation" from 2006, all outstanding.

Wellington Phoenix just missed out after a season mainly based in the Australian city of Wollongong thanks to the pandemic. Their return to New Zealand late on saw two crowds in excess of 20,000 to welcome them home.

Western Sydney Wanderers missed the finals for the fourth consecutive year, leading to criticism of new coach, Carl Robinson, and the club as a whole, while Perth Glory's delayed start to the campaign due to the Asian Champions League hindered their attempts, although a run of wins late on gave them a sniff.

Western United ended in tenth after another nomadic year traipsing around the country as they wait for their new stadium to be built – coach Mark Rudan paid with his job.

Newcastle Jets avoided the wooden spoon with a last-day victory over Melbourne City. But the club remain without an owner, with the Hunter-based outfit now in the control of four other A-League owners. Arthur Papas replaces Craig Deans as coach next season.

And, while City celebrated success, the dominant force in Melbourne for so long – Melbourne Victory – endured their worst-ever campaign, ending up with the wooden spoon for the first time. Former Asian Champions League winning coach, Tony Popovic, will look to arrest the slide next season.

This season also marked the end of broadcaster Fox Sports' involvement after 16 seasons. As of July, Channel 10 and new streaming service, Paramount Plus, will take over, in a deal worth around $200 million for five years.

• PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Jamie Maclaren
(Melbourne City)
The former Hibernian striker scored an impressive 25 goals in just 24 games, and it would have been more if the Socceroo had been available for the whole season.

• COACH OF THE SEASON
Patrick Kisnorbo
(Melbourne City)
The former Leicester City and Leeds United defender has been groomed for the job over the last few years, and delivered City's best-ever season: topping the table in the regular season before going on to win the Grand Final.

• MOST EXCITING NEWCOMER
Alou Kuol
(Central Coast Mariners)
One of many emerging from the African diaspora, the Khartoum-born teenager got his reward for a series of eye-catching displays with a move to Stuttgart.

Winners...City players lift the A-League crown

Champion... Patrick Kisnorbo

AUGUST 6-SEPTEMBER 2, 2021

Global diary

Games and dates to pencil in for the month ahead

(All kick-off times are BST)

Friday August 6

JAPAN: The Olympics reach their conclusion, with the women's final (3am) followed by the men's bronze medal match at midday.
ENGLAND: The first game of the 2021-22 domestic season takes place, with Bournemouth hosting West Bromwich Albion in the Championship.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich's season begins in the first round of the German Cup, as they travel to face fifth-tier Bremer SV.

Windsor Park...the UEFA Super Cup venue

Saturday August 7

JAPAN: The final match of the Olympics takes place at 12.30pm, with the men's final.
ENGLAND: Manchester City go in search of their third Community Shield in four seasons when they face Leicester City at Wembley. Kick-off at 5pm.
NETHERLANDS: The Dutch Super Cup – aka the Johan Cruyff Shield – also takes place, with Ajax facing PSV at the Amsterdam Arena, also named after the legendary No.14.
PORTUGAL: The new Primeira Liga campaign gets underway, with champions Sporting hosting newly-promoted Vizela.

Sunday August 8

FRANCE: The new Ligue 1 season begins, starting with Rennes hosting Lens at midday.

Tuesday August 10

EUROPE: Qualifying for the Champions League continues, with the first legs of the third qualifying round. Spartak Moscow v Benfica and Genk v Shakhtar Donetsk are the first confirmed fixtures.

Wednesday August 11

NORTHERN IRELAND: Belfast's Windsor Park plays host to the UEFA Super Cup, with Champions League winners Chelsea facing Europa League holders Villarreal.

Thursday August 12

EUROPE: Europa League qualifiers take place, with St. Johnstone of Scotland and Czech Republic's Jablonec among the clubs involved.

Friday August 13

ENGLAND: Brentford host fellow London club Arsenal in their first-ever Premier League game to kick-start the 2021-22 season.
GERMANY: The Bundesliga season begins with Borussia Monchengladbach against champions Bayern Munich.
NETHERLANDS: Eredivisie newcomers Go Ahead Eagles face Heerenveen in the first game of the new campaign.
SPAIN: In La Liga, the season begins at the Mestalla, with Valencia taking on Getafe.

Holders...Ajax won the last Johan Cruyff Shield in 2019

Saturday August 14

ITALY: The Italian season gets underway with the first round of the Coppa Italia, featuring teams who finished outside last season's top eight in Serie A.

Sunday August 15

TURKEY: The Turkish Super Lig also begins, with newly-promoted Adana Demirspor hosting Istanbul giants Fenerbahce, while reigning champions Besiktas face Rizespor.

Tuesday August 17

EUROPE: The first round of qualifying takes place for the Women's Champions League.

Wednesday August 18

EUROPE: Arsenal, Juventus and Celtic are among the teams in action for the second day of qualifying for the Women's Champions League.

Saturday August 21

ITALY: The new Serie A season kicks off with champions Internazionale hosting Genoa and Verona taking on Sassuolo.

Tuesday August 24

USA: The best players in the American and Mexican leagues meet as the MLS All-Stars take on the Liga MX All-Stars in California.

Tuesday August 31

EUROPE: The 2021 summer transfer window closes across Europe's major leagues.
AFRICA: The road to Qatar 2022 continues, as the second round group stage gets underway. Current African champions Algeria host Djibouti, Senegal face Togo, and Nigeria meet Liberia.

Wednesday September 1

EUROPE: The first international break of the season begins, with European World Cup qualifiers. Stand-out games include Denmark v Scotland, France v Bosnia-Herzegovina, Norway v Netherlands and Portugal v Republic of Ireland.
ASIA: The final round of Asian World Cup qualifiers begin, with Iran v Syria among the games in Group A, and Australia v China topping the billing in Group B.

Rematch... Sweden and Spain drew 0-0 in the Euro 2020 group stage

CONCACAF: Qualifying also takes place in North and Central America, including Mexico v Jamaica and El Salvador v USA.
SOUTH AMERICA: The seventh round of World Cup qualifying takes place in South America, with Chile hosting Brazil in a repeat of their Copa America quarter-final clash, and Peru hosting Uruguay.

Thursday September 2

EUROPE: World Cup qualifying continues, with Sweden and Spain renewing their Euro 2020 rivalry. Belgium, England, Italy, Germany, Czech Republic, Northern Ireland and Poland are also all in action.

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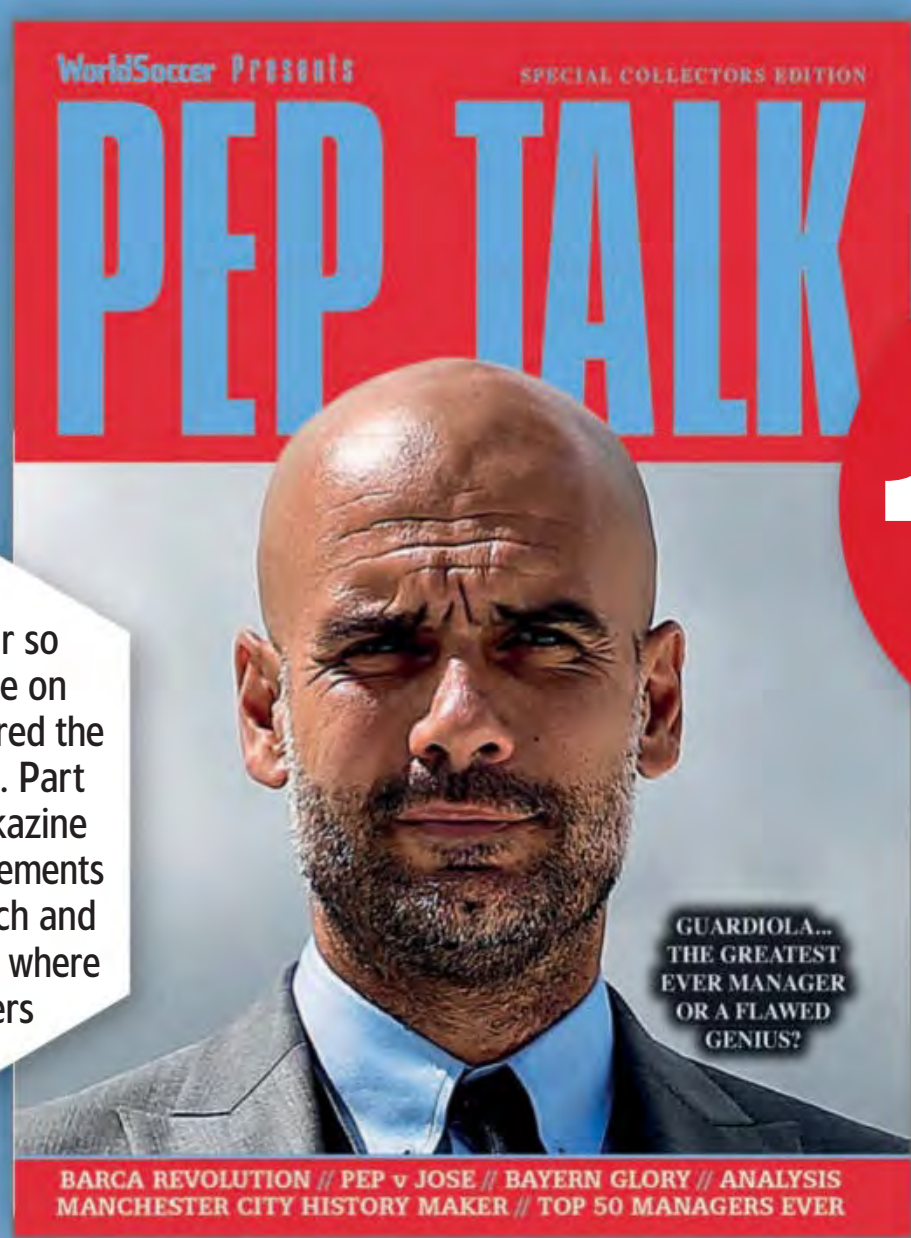

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PREMIER LEAGUE FIXTURES 2021-22

AUGUST 14
Brentford v Arsenal
Burnley v Brighton
Chelsea v Crystal Palace
Everton v Southampton
Leicester City v Wolves
Manchester United v Leeds United
Newcastle United v West Ham United
Norwich City v Liverpool
Tottenham Hotspur v Manchester City
Watford v Aston Villa

AUGUST 21
Arsenal v Chelsea
Aston Villa v Newcastle United
Brighton v Watford
Crystal Palace v Brentford
Leeds United v Everton
Liverpool v Burnley
Manchester City v Norwich City
Southampton v Manchester United
West Ham United v Leicester City
Wolves v Tottenham Hotspur

AUGUST 28
Aston Villa v Brentford
Brighton v Everton
Burnley v Leeds United
Liverpool v Chelsea
Manchester City v Arsenal
Newcastle United v Southampton
Norwich City v Leicester City
Tottenham Hotspur v Watford
West Ham United v Crystal Palace
Wolves v Manchester United

SEPTEMBER 11
Arsenal v Norwich City
Brentford v Brighton
Chelsea v Aston Villa
Crystal Palace v Tottenham Hotspur
Everton v Burnley
Leeds United v Liverpool
Leicester City v Manchester City
Manchester United v Newcastle United
Southampton v West Ham United
Watford v Wolves

SEPTEMBER 18
Aston Villa v Everton
Brighton v Leicester City
Burnley v Arsenal
Liverpool v Crystal Palace
Manchester City v Southampton
Newcastle United v Leeds United
Norwich City v Watford
Tottenham Hotspur v Chelsea
West Ham United v Manchester United
Wolves v Brentford

SEPTEMBER 25
Arsenal v Tottenham Hotspur
Brentford v Liverpool
Chelsea v Manchester City
Crystal Palace v Brighton
Everton v Norwich City
Leeds United v West Ham United
Leicester City v Burnley
Manchester United v Aston Villa
Southampton v Wolves
Watford v Newcastle United

OCTOBER 2
Brighton v Arsenal
Burnley v Norwich City
Chelsea v Southampton
Crystal Palace v Leicester City
Leeds United v Watford
Liverpool v Manchester City
Manchester United v Everton
Tottenham Hotspur v Aston Villa
West Ham United v Brentford
Wolves v Newcastle United

OCTOBER 16
Arsenal v Crystal Palace
Aston Villa v Wolves
Brentford v Chelsea
Everton v West Ham United
Leicester City v Manchester United
Manchester City v Burnley
Newcastle United v Tottenham Hotspur
Norwich City v Brighton
Southampton v Leeds United
Watford v Liverpool

OCTOBER 23
Arsenal v Aston Villa
Brentford v Leicester City
Brighton v Manchester City
Chelsea v Norwich City
Crystal Palace v Newcastle United
Everton v Watford
Leeds United v Wolves
Manchester United v Liverpool
Southampton v Burnley
West Ham United v Tottenham Hotspur

OCTOBER 30
Aston Villa v West Ham United
Burnley v Brentford
Leicester City v Arsenal
Liverpool v Brighton
Manchester City v Crystal Palace
Newcastle United v Chelsea
Norwich City v Leeds United
Tottenham Hotspur v Manchester United
Watford v Southampton
Wolves v Everton

NOVEMBER 6
Arsenal v Watford
Brentford v Norwich City
Brighton v Newcastle United
Chelsea v Burnley
Crystal Palace v Wolves
Everton v Tottenham Hotspur
Leeds United v Leicester City
Manchester United v Manchester City
Southampton v Aston Villa
West Ham United v Liverpool

NOVEMBER 20
Aston Villa v Brighton
Burnley v Crystal Palace
Leicester City v Chelsea
Liverpool v Arsenal
Manchester City v Everton
Newcastle United v Brentford
Norwich City v Southampton
Tottenham Hotspur v Leeds United
Watford v Manchester United
Wolves v West Ham United

NOVEMBER 27
Arsenal v Newcastle United
Brentford v Everton
Brighton v Leeds United
Burnley v Tottenham Hotspur
Chelsea v Manchester United
Crystal Palace v Aston Villa
Leicester City v Watford
Liverpool v Southampton
Manchester City v West Ham United
Norwich City v Wolves

NOVEMBER 30
Aston Villa v Manchester City
Everton v Liverpool
Leeds United v Crystal Palace
Manchester United v Arsenal
Watford v Chelsea
West Ham United v Brighton
Wolves v Burnley

DECEMBER 1
Newcastle United v Norwich City
Southampton v Leicester City
Tottenham Hotspur v Brentford

DECEMBER 4
Aston Villa v Leicester City
Everton v Arsenal
Leeds United v Brentford
Manchester United v Crystal Palace
Newcastle United v Burnley
Southampton v Brighton
Tottenham Hotspur v Norwich City
Watford v Manchester City
West Ham United v Chelsea
Wolves v Liverpool

DECEMBER 11
Arsenal v Southampton
Brentford v Watford
Brighton v Tottenham Hotspur
Burnley v West Ham United
Chelsea v Leeds United
Crystal Palace v Everton
Leicester City v Newcastle United
Liverpool v Aston Villa
Manchester City v Wolves
Norwich City v Manchester United

DECEMBER 14
Arsenal v West Ham United
Brentford v Manchester United
Brighton v Wolves
Burnley v Watford
Crystal Palace v Southampton
Leicester City v Tottenham Hotspur
Norwich City v Aston Villa

DECEMBER 15
Chelsea v Everton
Liverpool v Newcastle United
Manchester City v Leeds United

DECEMBER 18
Aston Villa v Burnley
Everton v Leicester City
Leeds United v Arsenal
Manchester United v Brighton
Newcastle United v Manchester City
Southampton v Brentford
Tottenham Hotspur v Liverpool
Watford v Crystal Palace
West Ham United v Norwich City
Wolves v Chelsea

DECEMBER 26
Aston Villa v Chelsea
Brighton v Brentford
Burnley v Everton
Liverpool v Leeds United
Manchester City v Leicester City
Newcastle United v Manchester United
Norwich City v Arsenal
Tottenham Hotspur v Crystal Palace
West Ham United v Southampton
Wolves v Watford

Feb 19...Crystal Palace v Chelsea

Oct 30...Tottenham v Manchester United

DECEMBER 28
Arsenal v Wolves
Brentford v Manchester City
Chelsea v Brighton
Crystal Palace v Norwich City
Everton v Newcastle United
Leeds United v Aston Villa
Leicester City v Liverpool
Manchester United v Burnley
Southampton v Tottenham Hotspur
Watford v West Ham United

JANUARY 1
Arsenal v Manchester City
Brentford v Aston Villa
Chelsea v Liverpool
Crystal Palace v West Ham United
Everton v Brighton
Leeds United v Burnley
Leicester City v Norwich City
Manchester United v Wolves
Southampton v Newcastle United
Watford v Tottenham Hotspur

JANUARY 15
Aston Villa v Manchester United
Brighton v Crystal Palace
Burnley v Leicester City
Liverpool v Brentford
Manchester City v Chelsea
Newcastle United v Watford
Norwich City v Everton
Tottenham Hotspur v Arsenal
West Ham United v Leeds United
Wolves v Southampton

JANUARY 22
Arsenal v Burnley
Brentford v Wolves
Chelsea v Tottenham Hotspur
Crystal Palace v Liverpool
Everton v Aston Villa
Leeds United v Newcastle United
Leicester City v Brighton
Manchester United v West Ham United
Southampton v Manchester City
Watford v Norwich City

FEBRUARY 8
Aston Villa v Leeds United
Brighton v Chelsea
Burnley v Manchester United
Norwich City v Crystal Palace
West Ham United v Watford
Wolves v Arsenal

FEBRUARY 9
Liverpool v Leicester City
Manchester City v Brentford
Newcastle United v Everton
Tottenham Hotspur v Southampton

FEBRUARY 12
Brentford v Crystal Palace
Burnley v Liverpool
Chelsea v Arsenal
Everton v Leeds United
Leicester City v West Ham United
Manchester United v Southampton
Newcastle United v Aston Villa
Norwich City v Manchester City
Tottenham Hotspur v Wolves
Watford v Brighton

FEBRUARY 19
Arsenal v Brentford
Aston Villa v Watford
Brighton v Burnley
Crystal Palace v Chelsea
Leeds United v Manchester United
Liverpool v Norwich City
Manchester City v Tottenham Hotspur
Southampton v Everton
West Ham United v Newcastle United
Wolves v Leicester City

FEBRUARY 26
Arsenal v Liverpool
Brentford v Newcastle United
Brighton v Aston Villa
Chelsea v Leicester City
Crystal Palace v Burnley
Everton v Manchester City
Leeds United v Tottenham Hotspur
Manchester United v Watford
Southampton v Norwich City
West Ham United v Wolves

MARCH 5
Aston Villa v Southampton
Burnley v Chelsea
Leicester City v Leeds United
Liverpool v West Ham United
Manchester City v Manchester United
Newcastle United v Brighton
Norwich City v Brentford
Tottenham Hotspur v Everton
Watford v Arsenal
Wolves v Crystal Palace

MARCH 12
Arsenal v Leicester City
Brentford v Burnley
Brighton v Liverpool
Chelsea v Newcastle United
Crystal Palace v Manchester City
Everton v Wolves
Leeds United v Norwich City
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Liverpool v Manchester United
Manchester City v Brighton
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Tottenham Hotspur v West Ham United
Watford v Everton
Wolves v Leeds United

APRIL 2
Brighton v Norwich City
Burnley v Manchester City
Chelsea v Brentford
Crystal Palace v Arsenal
Leeds United v Southampton
Liverpool v Watford
Manchester United v Leicester City
Tottenham Hotspur v Newcastle United
West Ham United v Everton
Wolves v Aston Villa

APRIL 9
Arsenal v Brighton

Apr 9...Manchester City v Liverpool

Aston Villa v Tottenham Hotspur
Brentford v West Ham United
Everton v Manchester United
Leicester City v Crystal Palace
Manchester City v Liverpool
Newcastle United v Wolves
Norwich City v Burnley
Southampton v Chelsea
Watford v Leeds United

APRIL 16
Aston Villa v Liverpool
Everton v Crystal Palace
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Norwich City v Newcastle United

APRIL 30
Aston Villa v Norwich City
Everton v Chelsea
Leeds United v Manchester City
Manchester United v Brentford
Newcastle United v Liverpool
Southampton v Crystal Palace
Tottenham Hotspur v Leicester City
Watford v Burnley
West Ham United v Arsenal
Wolves v Brighton

MAY 7
Arsenal v Leeds United
Brentford v Southampton
Brighton v Manchester United
Burnley v Aston Villa
Chelsea v Wolves
Crystal Palace v Watford
Leicester City v Everton
Liverpool v Tottenham Hotspur
Manchester City v Newcastle United
Norwich City v West Ham United

MAY 15
Aston Villa v Crystal Palace
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Leeds United v Brighton
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Southampton v Liverpool
Tottenham Hotspur v Burnley
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West Ham United v Manchester City
Wolves v Norwich City

MAY 22
Arsenal v Everton
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Brighton v West Ham United
Burnley v Newcastle United
Chelsea v Watford
Crystal Palace v Manchester United
Leicester City v Southampton
Liverpool v Wolves
Manchester City v Aston Villa
Norwich City v Tottenham Hotspur

•All fixtures are for the weekend commencing rather than the exact date of the games

LIGUE 1 FIXTURES 2021-22

AUGUST 8
Bordeaux v Clermont
Lyon v Brest
Metz v Lille
Monaco v Nantes
Montpellier v Marseille
Nice v Reims
Rennes v Lens
Saint-Etienne v Lorient
Strasbourg v Angers
Troyes v Paris Saint-Germain

AUGUST 15
Angers v Lyon
Brest v Rennes
Clermont v Troyes
Lens v Saint-Etienne
Lille v Nice
Lorient v Monaco
Marseille v Bordeaux
Nantes v Metz
Paris Saint-Germain v Strasbourg
Reims v Montpellier

AUGUST 22
Bordeaux v Angers
Brest v Paris Saint-Germain
Lyon v Clermont
Metz v Reims
Monaco v Lens
Montpellier v Lorient
Nice v Marseille
Rennes v Nantes
Saint-Etienne v Lille
Strasbourg v Troyes

AUGUST 29
Angers v Rennes
Clermont v Metz
Lens v Lorient
Lille v Montpellier
Marseille v Saint-Etienne
Nantes v Lyon
Nice v Bordeaux
Reims v Paris Saint-Germain
Strasbourg v Brest
Troyes v Monaco

SEPTEMBER 12
Bordeaux v Lens
Brest v Angers
Lorient v Lille
Lyon v Strasbourg
Metz v Troyes
Monaco v Marseille
Montpellier v Saint-Etienne
Nantes v Nice
Paris Saint-Germain v Clermont
Rennes v Reims

SEPTEMBER 19
Angers v Nantes
Clermont v Brest
Lens v Lille
Marseille v Rennes
Nice v Monaco
Paris Saint-Germain v Lyon
Reims v Lorient
Saint-Etienne v Bordeaux
Strasbourg v Metz
Troyes v Montpellier

SEPTEMBER 22
Angers v Marseille
Lens v Strasbourg
Lille v Reims
Lorient v Nice
Lyon v Troyes
Metz v Paris Saint-Germain
Monaco v Saint-Etienne
Montpellier v Bordeaux
Nantes v Brest
Rennes v Clermont

SEPTEMBER 26
Bordeaux v Rennes
Brest v Metz

Nov 21... Monaco v Lille

Clermont v Monaco
Lyon v Lorient
Marseille v Lens
Paris Saint-Germain v Montpellier
Reims v Nantes
Saint-Etienne v Nice
Strasbourg v Lille
Troyes v Angers

OCTOBER 3
Angers v Metz
Lens v Reims
Lille v Marseille
Lorient v Clermont
Monaco v Bordeaux
Montpellier v Strasbourg
Nantes v Troyes
Nice v Brest
Rennes v Paris Saint-Germain
Saint-Etienne v Lyon

OCTOBER 17
Bordeaux v Nantes
Brest v Reims
Clermont v Lille
Lyon v Monaco
Marseille v Lorient
Metz v Rennes
Montpellier v Lens
Paris Saint-Germain v Angers
Strasbourg v Saint-Etienne
Troyes v Nice

OCTOBER 24
Lens v Metz
Lille v Brest
Lorient v Bordeaux
Marseille v Paris Saint-Germain
Monaco v Montpellier
Nantes v Clermont
Nice v Lyon
Reims v Troyes
Rennes v Strasbourg
Saint-Etienne v Angers

OCTOBER 31
Angers v Nice
Bordeaux v Reims
Brest v Monaco
Clermont v Marseille
Lyon v Lens
Metz v Saint-Etienne
Montpellier v Nantes
Paris Saint-Germain v Lille
Strasbourg v Lorient
Troyes v Rennes

NOVEMBER 7
Bordeaux v Paris Saint-Germain
Lens v Troyes
Lille v Angers
Lorient v Brest
Marseille v Metz
Nantes v Strasbourg
Nice v Montpellier
Reims v Monaco
Rennes v Lyon
Saint-Etienne v Clermont

NOVEMBER 21
Angers v Lorient
Brest v Lens
Clermont v Nice
Lyon v Marseille
Metz v Bordeaux
Monaco v Lille
Paris Saint-Germain v Nantes
Rennes v Montpellier
Strasbourg v Reims
Troyes v Saint-Etienne

NOVEMBER 28
Bordeaux v Brest
Lens v Angers
Lille v Nantes
Lorient v Rennes
Marseille v Troyes
Monaco v Strasbourg
Montpellier v Lyon
Nice v Metz
Reims v Clermont
Saint-Etienne v Paris Saint-Germain

DECEMBER 1
Angers v Monaco
Brest v Saint-Etienne
Clermont v Lens
Lyon v Reims
Metz v Montpellier
Nantes v Marseille
Paris Saint-Germain v Nice
Rennes v Lille
Strasbourg v Bordeaux
Troyes v Lorient

DECEMBER 5
Bordeaux v Lyon
Lens v Paris Saint-Germain
Lille v Troyes
Lorient v Nantes
Marseille v Brest
Monaco v Metz
Montpellier v Clermont
Nice v Strasbourg
Reims v Angers
Saint-Etienne v Rennes

DECEMBER 12
Angers v Clermont
Brest v Montpellier
Lille v Lyon
Metz v Lorient
Nantes v Lens
Paris Saint-Germain v Monaco
Reims v Saint-Etienne
Rennes v Nice
Strasbourg v Marseille
Troyes v Bordeaux

DECEMBER 22
Bordeaux v Lille
Clermont v Strasbourg
Lorient v Paris Saint-Germain
Lyon v Metz
Marseille v Reims
Monaco v Rennes

Oct 24...Marseille v Paris Saint-Germain

Montpellier v Angers
Nice v Lens
Saint-Etienne v Nantes
Troyes v Brest

JANUARY 9

Angers v Saint-Etienne
Bordeaux v Marseille
Brest v Nice
Clermont v Reims
Lens v Rennes
Lille v Lorient
Lyon v Paris Saint-Germain
Metz v Strasbourg
Montpellier v Troyes
Nantes v Monaco

JANUARY 16

Lorient v Angers
Marseille v Lille
Monaco v Clermont
Nice v Nantes
Paris Saint-Germain v Brest
Reims v Metz
Rennes v Bordeaux
Saint-Etienne v Lens
Strasbourg v Montpellier
Troyes v Lyon

JANUARY 23

Angers v Troyes
Bordeaux v Strasbourg
Brest v Lille
Clermont v Rennes
Lens v Marseille
Lyon v Saint-Etienne
Metz v Nice
Montpellier v Monaco
Nantes v Lorient
Paris Saint-Germain v Reims

FEBRUARY 6

Lille v Paris Saint-Germain
Lorient v Lens
Marseille v Angers
Monaco v Lyon
Nice v Clermont
Reims v Bordeaux
Rennes v Brest
Saint-Etienne v Montpellier
Strasbourg v Nantes
Troyes v Metz

FEBRUARY 13

Angers v Strasbourg
Brest v Troyes
Clermont v Saint-Etienne
Lens v Bordeaux
Lyon v Nice
Metz v Marseille
Monaco v Lorient
Montpellier v Lille
Nantes v Reims
Paris Saint-Germain v Rennes

FEBRUARY 20

Bordeaux v Monaco
Lens v Lyon
Lille v Metz
Lorient v Montpellier
Marseille v Clermont
Nantes v Paris Saint-Germain
Nice v Angers
Reims v Brest
Rennes v Troyes
Saint-Etienne v Strasbourg

FEBRUARY 27

Angers v Lens
Brest v Lorient
Clermont v Bordeaux
Lyon v Lille
Metz v Nantes
Monaco v Reims

Montpellier v Rennes
Paris Saint-Germain v Saint-Etienne
Strasbourg v Nice
Troyes v Marseille

MARCH 6

Bordeaux v Troyes
Lens v Brest
Lille v Clermont
Lorient v Lyon
Marseille v Monaco
Nantes v Montpellier
Nice v Paris Saint-Germain
Reims v Strasbourg
Rennes v Angers
Saint-Etienne v Metz

MARCH 13

Angers v Reims
Brest v Marseille
Clermont v Lorient
Lille v Saint-Etienne
Lyon v Rennes
Metz v Lens
Montpellier v Nice
Paris Saint-Germain v Bordeaux
Strasbourg v Monaco
Troyes v Nantes

MARCH 20

Angers v Brest
Bordeaux v Montpellier
Lens v Clermont
Lorient v Strasbourg
Marseille v Nice
Monaco v Paris Saint-Germain
Nantes v Lille
Reims v Lyon
Rennes v Metz
Saint-Etienne v Troyes

APRIL 3

Clermont v Nantes
Lille v Bordeaux
Lyon v Angers
Metz v Monaco
Montpellier v Brest
Nice v Rennes
Paris Saint-Germain v Lorient
Saint-Etienne v Marseille
Strasbourg v Lens
Troyes v Reims

APRIL 10

Angers v Lille
Bordeaux v Metz
Brest v Nantes
Clermont v Paris Saint-Germain
Lens v Nice
Lorient v Saint-Etienne
Marseille v Montpellier
Monaco v Troyes
Reims v Rennes
Strasbourg v Lyon

APRIL 17

Lille v Lens
Lyon v Bordeaux
Metz v Clermont
Montpellier v Reims
Nantes v Angers
Nice v Lorient
Paris Saint-Germain v Marseille
Rennes v Monaco
Saint-Etienne v Brest
Troyes v Strasbourg

APRIL 20

Angers v Paris Saint-Germain
Bordeaux v Saint-Etienne
Brest v Lyon
Lens v Montpellier
Lorient v Metz
Marseille v Nantes
Monaco v Nice
Reims v Lille
Strasbourg v Rennes
Troyes v Clermont

APRIL 24

Clermont v Angers
Lille v Strasbourg
Lyon v Montpellier
Metz v Brest
Nantes v Bordeaux
Nice v Troyes
Paris Saint-Germain v Lens
Reims v Marseille
Rennes v Lorient
Saint-Etienne v Monaco

MAY 1

Bordeaux v Nice
Brest v Clermont
Lens v Nantes
Lorient v Reims
Marseille v Lyon
Monaco v Angers
Montpellier v Metz
Rennes v Saint-Etienne
Strasbourg v Paris Saint-Germain
Troyes v Lille

MAY 8

Angers v Bordeaux
Brest v Strasbourg
Clermont v Montpellier
Lille v Monaco
Lorient v Marseille
Metz v Lyon
Nantes v Rennes
Nice v Saint-Etienne
Paris Saint-Germain v Troyes
Reims v Lens

MAY 14

Bordeaux v Lorient
Lyon v Nantes
Metz v Angers
Monaco v Brest
Montpellier v Paris Saint-Germain
Nice v Lille
Rennes v Marseille
Saint-Etienne v Reims
Strasbourg v Clermont
Troyes v Lens

MAY 21

Angers v Montpellier
Brest v Bordeaux
Clermont v Lyon
Lens v Monaco
Lille v Rennes
Lorient v Troyes
Marseille v Strasbourg
Nantes v Saint-Etienne
Paris Saint-Germain v Metz
Reims v Nice

• All fixtures are for the weekend commencing rather than the exact date of the games

BUNDESLIGA FIXTURES 2021-22

AUGUST 14

Bor M'gladbach v Bayern Munich
Cologne v Hertha Berlin
Union Berlin v Bayer Leverkusen
Mainz v RB Leipzig
Borussia Dortmund v Eintract Frankfurt
Arminia Bielefeld v Freiburg
Augsburg v Hoffenheim
Stuttgart v Greuther Furth
Wolfsburg v Bochum

AUGUST 21

Bayer Leverkusen v Bor M'gladbach
Eintract Frankfurt v Augsburg
Bayern Munich v Cologne
Hertha Berlin v Wolfsburg
RB Leipzig v Stuttgart
Freiburg v Borussia Dortmund
Greuther Furth v Arminia Bielefeld
Hoffenheim v Union Berlin
Bochum v Mainz

AUGUST 28

Cologne v Bochum
Union Berlin v Bor M'gladbach
Mainz v Greuther Furth
Borussia Dortmund v Hoffenheim
Arminia Bielefeld v Eintract Frankfurt
Augsburg v Bayer Leverkusen
Bayern Munich v Hertha Berlin
Stuttgart v Freiburg
Wolfsburg v RB Leipzig

SEPTEMBER 11

Union Berlin v Augsburg
Bayer Leverkusen v Borussia Dortmund
Bor M'gladbach v Arminia Bielefeld
Eintract Frankfurt v Stuttgart
RB Leipzig v Bayern Munich
Freiburg v Cologne
Greuther Furth v Wolfsburg
Hoffenheim v Mainz
Bochum v Hertha Berlin

SEPTEMBER 18

Cologne v RB Leipzig
Mainz v Freiburg
Borussia Dortmund v Union Berlin
Arminia Bielefeld v Hoffenheim
Augsburg v Bor M'gladbach
Bayern Munich v Bochum
Hertha Berlin v Greuther Furth
Stuttgart v Bayer Leverkusen
Wolfsburg v Eintract Frankfurt

SEPTEMBER 25

Union Berlin v Arminia Bielefeld
Bayer Leverkusen v Mainz
Bor M'gladbach v Borussia Dortmund
Eintract Frankfurt v Cologne
RB Leipzig v Hertha Berlin
Freiburg v Augsburg
Greuther Furth v Bayern Munich
Hoffenheim v Wolfsburg
Bochum v Stuttgart

OCTOBER 2

Cologne v Greuther Furth
Mainz v Union Berlin
Borussia Dortmund v Augsburg
Arminia Bielefeld v Bayer Leverkusen
Bayern Munich v Eintract Frankfurt
Hertha Berlin v Freiburg
RB Leipzig v Bochum
Stuttgart v Hoffenheim
Wolfsburg v Bor M'gladbach

OCTOBER 16

Union Berlin v Wolfsburg
Bayer Leverkusen v Bayern Munich
Borussia Dortmund v Mainz
Bor M'gladbach v Stuttgart
Eintract Frankfurt v Hertha Berlin
Augsburg v Arminia Bielefeld
Freiburg v RB Leipzig
Greuther Furth v Bochum
Hoffenheim v Cologne

OCTOBER 23

Cologne v Bayer Leverkusen
Mainz v Augsburg
Arminia Bielefeld v Borussia Dortmund
Bayern Munich v Hoffenheim
Hertha Berlin v Bor M'gladbach
RB Leipzig v Greuther Furth
Stuttgart v Union Berlin
Bochum v Eintract Frankfurt
Wolfsburg v Freiburg

OCTOBER 30

Union Berlin v Bayern Munich
Bayer Leverkusen v Wolfsburg
Borussia Dortmund v Cologne
Bor M'gladbach v Bochum
Arminia Bielefeld v Mainz
Eintract Frankfurt v RB Leipzig
Augsburg v Stuttgart
Freiburg v Greuther Furth
Hoffenheim v Hertha Berlin

Nov 6...RB Leipzig v Borussia Dortmund

NOVEMBER 6

Cologne v Union Berlin
Mainz v Bor M'gladbach
Bayern Munich v Freiburg
Hertha Berlin v Bayer Leverkusen
RB Leipzig v Borussia Dortmund
Greuther Furth v Eintract Frankfurt
Stuttgart v Arminia Bielefeld
Bochum v Hoffenheim
Wolfsburg v Augsburg

NOVEMBER 20

Union Berlin v Hertha Berlin
Mainz v Cologne
Bayer Leverkusen v Bochum
Borussia Dortmund v Stuttgart
Bor M'gladbach v Greuther Furth
Arminia Bielefeld v Wolfsburg
Augsburg v Bayern Munich
Freiburg v Eintract Frankfurt
Hoffenheim v RB Leipzig

NOVEMBER 27

Cologne v Bor M'gladbach
Eintract Frankfurt v Union Berlin
Bayern Munich v Arminia Bielefeld
Hertha Berlin v Augsburg
RB Leipzig v Bayer Leverkusen
Greuther Furth v Hoffenheim
Stuttgart v Mainz
Bochum v Freiburg
Wolfsburg v Borrusia Dortmund

DECEMBER 4

Union Berlin v RB Leipzig
Mainz v Wolfsburg
Bayer Leverkusen v Greuther Furth
Borussia Dortmund v Bayern Munich
Bor M'gladbach v Freiburg
Arminia Bielefeld v Cologne
Augsburg v Bochum
Hoffenheim v Eintract Frankfurt
Stuttgart v Hertha Berlin

DECEMBER 11

Cologne v Augsburg
Eintract Frankfurt v Bayer Leverkusen
Bayern Munich v Mainz
Hertha Berlin v Arminia Bielefeld
RB Leipzig v Bor M'gladbach
Freiburg v Hoffenheim
Greuther Furth v Union Berlin
Bochum v Borussia Dortmund
Wolfsburg v Stuttgart

DECEMBER 15

Union Berlin v Freiburg
Mainz v Hertha Berlin
Bayer Leverkusen v Hoffenheim
Borussia Dortmund v Greuther Furth
Bor M'gladbach v Eintract Frankfurt
Arminia Bielefeld v Bochum
Augsburg v RB Leipzig
Stuttgart v Bayern Munich
Wolfsburg v Cologne

DECEMBER 18

Cologne v Stuttgart
Eintract Frankfurt v Mainz
Bayern Munich v Wolfsburg
Hertha Berlin v Borussia Dortmund
RB Leipzig v Arminia Bielefeld
Freiburg v Bayer Leverkusen
Greuther Furth v Augsburg
Hoffenheim v Bor M'gladbach
Bochum v Union Berlin

JANUARY 8

Bayer Leverkusen v Union Berlin
Eintract Frankfurt v Borussia Dortmund
Bayern Munich v Bor M'gladbach
Hertha Berlin v Cologne
RB Leipzig v Mainz
Freiburg v Arminia Bielefeld
Greuther Furth v Stuttgart
Hoffenheim v Augsburg
Bochum v Wolfsburg

Oct 16...Union Berlin v Wolfsburg

Apr 30...Mainz v Bayern Munich

JANUARY 15
Cologne v Bayern Munich
Union Berlin v Hoffenheim
Mainz v Bochum
Borussia Dortmund v Freiburg
Bor M'gladbach v Bayer Leverkusen
Arminia Bielefeld v Greuther Furth
Augsburg v Eintract Frankfurt
Stuttgart v RB Leipzig
Wolfsburg v Hertha Berlin

JANUARY 22
Bayer Leverkusen v Augsburg
Bor M'gladbach v Union Berlin
Eintract Frankfurt v Arminia Bielefeld
Hertha Berlin v Bayern Munich
RB Leipzig v Wolfsburg
Freiburg v Stuttgart
Greuther Furth v Mainz
Hoffenheim v Borussia Dortmund
Bochum v Cologne

FEBRUARY 5
Cologne v Freiburg
Mainz v Hoffenheim
Borussia Dortmund v Bayer Leverkusen
Arminia Bielefeld v Bor M'gladbach
Augsburg v Union Berlin
Bayern Munich v RB Leipzig
Hertha Berlin v Bochum
Stuttgart v Eintract Frankfurt
Wolfsburg v Greuther Furth

FEBRUARY 12
Union Berlin v Borrusia Dortmund
Bayer Leverkusen v Stuttgart
Bor M'gladbach v Augsburg
Eintract Frankfurt v Wolfsburg
RB Leipzig v Cologne
Freiburg v Mainz
Greuther Furth v Hertha Berlin
Hoffenheim v Arminia Bielefeld
Bochum v Bayern Munich

FEBRUARY 19
Cologne v Eintract Frankfurt
Mainz v Bayer Leverkusen
Borussia Dortmund v Bor M'gladbach
Arminia Bielefeld v Union Berlin
Augsburg v Freiburg
Bayern Munich v Greuther Furth
Hertha Berlin v RB Leipzig
Stuttgart v Bochum
Wolfsburg v Hoffenheim

FEBRUARY 26
Union Berlin v Mainz
Bayer Leverkusen v Arminia Bielefeld
Bor M'gladbach v Wolfsburg
Eintract Frankfurt v Bayern Munich
Augsburg v Borussia Dortmund
Freiburg v Hertha Berlin
Greuther Furth v Cologne
Hoffenheim v Stuttgart
Bochum v RB Leipzig

MARCH 5
Cologne v Hoffenheim
Mainz v Borussia Dortmund
Arminia Bielefeld v Augsburg
Bayern Munich v Bayer Leverkusen
Hertha Berlin v Eintract Frankfurt
RB Leipzig v Freiburg
Stuttgart v Bor M'gladbach
Bochum v Greuther Furth
Wolfsburg v Union Berlin

MARCH 12
Union Berlin v Stuttgart
Bayer Leverkusen v Cologne
Borussia Dortmund v Arminia Bielefeld
Bor M'gladbach v Hertha Berlin
Eintract Frankfurt v Bochum
Augsburg v Mainz
Freiburg v Wolfsburg
Greuther Furth v RB Leipzig
Hoffenheim v Bayern Munich

MARCH 19
Cologne v Borussia Dortmund
Mainz v Arminia Bielefeld
Bayern Munich v Union Berlin
Hertha Berlin v Hoffenheim
RB Leipzig v Eintract Frankfurt
Greuther Furth v Freiburg
Stuttgart v Augsburg
Bochum v Bor M'gladbach
Wolfsburg v Bayer Leverkusen

APRIL 2
Union Berlin v Cologne
Bayer Leverkusen v Hertha Berlin
Borussia Dortmund v RB Leipzig
Bor M'gladbach v Mainz
Arminia Bielefeld v Stuttgart
Eintract Frankfurt v Greuther Furth
Augsburg v Wolfsburg
Freiburg v Bayern Munich
Hoffenheim v Bochum

APRIL 9
Cologne v Mainz
Eintract Frankfurt v Freiburg
Bayern Munich v Augsburg
Hertha Berlin v Union Berlin
RB Leipzig v Hoffenheim
Greuther Furth v Bor M'gladbach
Stuttgart v Borussia Dortmund
Bochum v Bayer Leverkusen
Wolfsburg v Arminia Bielefeld

APRIL 16
Union Berlin v Eintract Frankfurt
Mainz v Stuttgart
Bayer Leverkusen v RB Leipzig
Borussia Dortmund v Wolfsburg
Bor M'gladbach v Cologne
Arminia Bielefeld v Bayern Munich
Augsburg v Hertha Berlin
Freiburg v Bochum
Hoffenheim v Greuther Furth

APRIL 23
Cologne v Arminia Bielefeld
Eintract Frankfurt v Hoffenheim
Bayern Munich v Borussia Dortmund
Hertha Berlin v Stuttgart
RB Leipzig v Union Berlin
Freiburg v Bor M'gladbach
Greuther Furth v Bayer Leverkusen
Bochum v Augsburg
Wolfsburg v Mainz

APRIL 30
Union Berlin v Greuther Furth
Mainz v Bayern Munich
Bayer Leverkusen v Eintract Frankfurt
Borussia Dortmund v Bochum
Bor M'gladbach v RB Leipzig
Arminia Bielefeld v Hertha Berlin
Augsburg v Cologne
Hoffenheim v Freiburg
Stuttgart v Wolfsburg

MAY 7
Cologne v Wolfsburg
Eintract Frankfurt v Bor M'gladbach
Bayern Munich v Stuttgart
Hertha Berlin v Mainz
RB Leipzig v Augsburg
Freiburg v Union Berlin
Greuther Furth v Borussia Dortmund
Hoffenheim v Bayer Leverkusen
Bochum v Arminia Bielefeld

MAY 14
Union Berlin v Bochum
Mainz v Eintract Frankfurt
Bayer Leverkusen v Freiburg
Borussia Dortmund v Hertha Berlin
Bor M'gladbach v Hoffenheim
Arminia Bielefeld v RB Leipzig
Augsburg v Greuther Furth
Stuttgart v Cologne
Wolfsburg v Bayern Munich

• All fixtures are for the weekend commencing rather than the exact date of the games

SERIE A FIXTURES 2021-22

AUGUST 22
Bologna v Salernitana
Cagliari v Spezia
Empoli v Lazio
Internazionale v Genoa
Napoli v Venezia
Roma v Fiorentina
Sampdoria v Milan
Torino v Atalanta
Udinese v Juventus
Verona v Sassuolo

AUGUST 29
Atalanta v Bologna
Fiorentina v Torino
Genoa v Napoli
Juventus v Empoli
Lazio v Spezia
Milan v Cagliari
Salernitana v Roma
Sassuolo v Sampdoria
Udinese v Venezia
Verona v Internazionale

SEPTEMBER 12
Atalanta v Fiorentina
Bologna v Verona
Cagliari v Genoa
Empoli v Venezia
Milan v Lazio
Napoli v Juventus
Roma v Sassuolo
Sampdoria v Internazionale
Spezia v Udinese
Torino v Salernitana

SEPTEMBER 19
Empoli v Sampdoria
Genoa v Fiorentina
Internazionale v Bologna
Juventus v Milan
Lazio v Cagliari
Salernitana v Atalanta
Sassuolo v Torino
Udinese v Napoli
Venezia v Spezia
Verona v Roma

SEPTEMBER 22
Atalanta v Sassuolo
Bologna v Genoa
Cagliari v Empoli
Fiorentina v Internazionale
Milan v Venezia
Roma v Udinese
Salernitana v Verona
Sampdoria v Napoli
Spezia v Juventus
Torino v Lazio

SEPTEMBER 26
Empoli v Bologna
Genoa v Verona
Internazionale v Atalanta
Juventus v Sampdoria
Lazio v Roma
Napoli v Cagliari
Sassuolo v Salernitana
Spezia v Milan
Udinese v Fiorentina
Venezia v Torino

OCTOBER 3
Atalanta v Milan
Bologna v Lazio
Cagliari v Venezia
Fiorentina v Napoli
Roma v Empoli
Salernitana v Genoa
Sampdoria v Udinese
Sassuolo v Internazionale
Torino v Juventus
Verona v Spezia

OCTOBER 17
Cagliari v Sampdoria
Empoli v Atalanta
Genoa v Sassuolo
Juventus v Roma
Lazio v Internazionale
Milan v Verona
Napoli v Torino
Spezia v Salernitana
Udinese v Bologna
Venezia v Fiorentina

OCTOBER 24
Atalanta v Udinese
Bologna v Milan
Fiorentina v Cagliari
Internazionale v Juventus
Roma v Napoli
Salernitana v Empoli
Sampdoria v Spezia
Sassuolo v Venezia
Torino v Genoa
Verona v Lazio

OCTOBER 27
Cagliari v Roma
Empoli v Internazionale
Juventus v Sassuolo
Lazio v Fiorentina
Milan v Torino
Napoli v Bologna
Sampdoria v Atalanta
Spezia v Genoa
Udinese v Verona
Venezia v Salernitana

OCTOBER 31
Atalanta v Lazio
Bologna v Cagliari
Fiorentina v Spezia
Genoa v Venezia
Internazionale v Udinese
Roma v Milan
Salernitana v Napoli
Sassuolo v Empoli
Torino v Sampdoria
Verona v Juventus

NOVEMBER 7
Cagliari v Atalanta
Empoli v Genoa
Juventus v Fiorentina
Lazio v Salernitana
Milan v Internazionale
Napoli v Verona
Sampdoria v Bologna
Spezia v Torino
Udinese v Sassuolo
Venezia v Roma

NOVEMBER 21
Atalanta v Spezia
Bologna v Venezia
Fiorentina v Milan
Genoa v Roma
Internazionale v Napoli
Lazio v Juventus
Salernitana v Sampdoria
Sassuolo v Cagliari
Torino v Udinese
Verona v Empoli

NOVEMBER 28
Cagliari v Salernitana
Empoli v Fiorentina
Juventus v Atalanta
Milan v Sassuolo
Napoli v Lazio
Roma v Torino
Sampdoria v Verona
Spezia v Bologna
Udinese v Genoa
Venezia v Internazionale

DECEMBER 1
Atalanta v Venezia
Bologna v Roma
Fiorentina v Sampdoria
Genoa v Milan
Internazionale v Spezia
Lazio v Udinese
Salernitana v Juventus
Sassuolo v Napoli
Torino v Empoli
Verona v Cagliari

DECEMBER 5
Bologna v Fiorentina
Cagliari v Torino
Empoli v Udinese
Juventus v Genoa
Milan v Salernitana
Napoli v Atalanta
Roma v Internazionale
Sampdoria v Lazio
Spezia v Sassuolo
Venezia v Verona

DECEMBER 12
Fiorentina v Salernitana
Genoa v Sampdoria
Internazionale v Cagliari
Napoli v Empoli
Roma v Spezia
Sassuolo v Lazio
Torino v Bologna

Udinese v Milan
Venezia v Juventus
Verona v Atalanta

DECEMBER 19
Atalanta v Roma
Bologna v Juventus
Cagliari v Udinese
Fiorentina v Sassuolo
Lazio v Genoa
Milan v Napoli
Salernitana v Internazionale
Sampdoria v Venezia
Spezia v Empoli
Torino v Verona

DECEMBER 22
Empoli v Milan
Genoa v Atalanta

Nov 7...Milan v Internazionale

Feb 13...Atalanta v Juventus

Internazionale v Torino
Juventus v Cagliari
Napoli v Spezia
Roma v Sampdoria
Sassuolo v Bologna
Udinese v Salernitana
Venezia v Lazio
Verona v Fiorentina

JANUARY 6

Atalanta v Torino
Bologna v Internazionale
Fiorentina v Udinese
Juventus v Napoli
Lazio v Empoli
Milan v Roma
Salernitana v Venezia
Sampdoria v Cagliari
Sassuolo v Genoa
Spezia v Verona

JANUARY 9

Cagliari v Bologna
Empoli v Sassuolo
Genoa v Spezia
Internazionale v Lazio
Napoli v Sampdoria
Roma v Juventus
Torino v Fiorentina
Udinese v Atalanta
Venezia v Milan
Verona v Salernitana

JANUARY 16

Atalanta v Internazionale
Bologna v Napoli
Fiorentina v Genoa
Juventus v Udinese
Milan v Spezia
Roma v Cagliari
Salernitana v Lazio
Sampdoria v Torino
Sassuolo v Verona
Venezia v Empoli

JANUARY 23

Cagliari v Fiorentina
Empoli v Roma
Genoa v Udinese
Internazionale v Venezia
Lazio v Atalanta
Milan v Juventus
Napoli v Salernitana
Spezia v Sampdoria
Torino v Sassuolo
Verona v Bologna

FEBRUARY 6

Atalanta v Cagliari
Bologna v Empoli
Fiorentina v Lazio
Internazionale v Milan
Juventus v Verona
Roma v Genoa
Salernitana v Spezia
Sampdoria v Sassuolo
Udinese v Torino
Venezia v Napoli

FEBRUARY 13

Atalanta v Juventus
Empoli v Cagliari
Genoa v Salernitana
Lazio v Bologna
Milan v Sampdoria
Napoli v Internazionale
Sassuolo v Roma
Spezia v Fiorentina
Torino v Venezia
Verona v Udinese

FEBRUARY 20

Bologna v Spezia
Cagliari v Napoli
Fiorentina v Atalanta
Internazionale v Sassuolo
Juventus v Torino
Roma v Verona
Salernitana v Milan
Sampdoria v Empoli
Udinese v Lazio
Venezia v Genoa

FEBRUARY 27

Atalanta v Sampdoria
Empoli v Juventus
Genoa v Internazionale
Lazio v Napoli
Milan v Udinese
Salernitana v Bologna
Sassuolo v Fiorentina
Spezia v Roma
Torino v Cagliari
Verona v Venezia

MARCH 6

Bologna v Torino
Cagliari v Lazio
Fiorentina v Verona
Genoa v Empoli
Internazionale v Salernitana
Juventus v Spezia
Napoli v Milan
Roma v Atalanta
Udinese v Sampdoria
Venezia v Sassuolo

MARCH 13

Atalanta v Genoa
Fiorentina v Bologna
Lazio v Venezia
Milan v Empoli
Salernitana v Sassuolo
Sampdoria v Juventus
Spezia v Cagliari
Torino v Internazionale
Udinese v Roma
Verona v Napoli

MARCH 20

Bologna v Atalanta
Cagliari v Milan
Empoli v Verona
Genoa v Torino
Internazionale v Fiorentina
Juventus v Salernitana
Napoli v Udinese
Roma v Lazio
Sassuolo v Spezia
Venezia v Sampdoria

APRIL 3

Atalanta v Napoli
Fiorentina v Empoli
Juventus v Internazionale
Lazio v Sassuolo
Milan v Bologna
Salernitana v Torino
Sampdoria v Roma
Spezia v Venezia
Udinese v Cagliari
Verona v Genoa

APRIL 10

Bologna v Sampdoria
Cagliari v Juventus
Empoli v Spezia
Genoa v Lazio
Internazionale v Verona
Napoli v Fiorentina
Roma v Salernitana
Sassuolo v Atalanta
Torino v Milan
Venezia v Udinese

APRIL 16

Atalanta v Verona
Cagliari v Sassuolo
Fiorentina v Venezia
Juventus v Bologna
Lazio v Torino
Milan v Genoa
Napoli v Roma
Sampdoria v Salernitana
Spezia v Internazionale
Udinese v Empoli

APRIL 24

Bologna v Udinese
Empoli v Napoli
Genoa v Cagliari
Internazionale v Roma
Lazio v Milan
Salernitana v Fiorentina
Sassuolo v Juventus
Torino v Spezia
Venezia v Atalanta
Verona v Sampdoria

MAY 1

Atalanta v Salernitana
Cagliari v Verona
Empoli v Torino
Juventus v Venezia
Milan v Fiorentina
Napoli v Sassuolo
Roma v Bologna
Sampdoria v Genoa
Spezia v Lazio
Udinese v Internazionale

MAY 8

Fiorentina v Roma
Genoa v Juventus
Internazionale v Empoli
Lazio v Sampdoria
Salernitana v Cagliari
Sassuolo v Udinese
Spezia v Atalanta
Torino v Napoli
Venezia v Bologna
Verona v Milan

MAY 15

Bologna v Sassuolo
Cagliari v Internazionale
Empoli v Salernitana
Juventus v Lazio
Milan v Atalanta
Napoli v Genoa
Roma v Venezia
Sampdoria v Fiorentina
Udinese v Spezia
Verona v Torino

MAY 22

Atalanta v Empoli
Fiorentina v Juventus
Genoa v Bologna
Internazionale v Sampdoria
Lazio v Verona
Salernitana v Udinese
Sassuolo v Milan
Spezia v Napoli
Torino v Roma
Venezia v Cagliari

Apr 10...Napoli v Fiorentina

• All fixtures are for the weekend commencing rather than the exact date of the games

LA LIGA FIXTURES 2021-22

AUGUST 15
Alaves v Real Madrid
Barcelona v Real Sociedad
Cadiz v Levante
Celta Vigo v Atletico Madrid
Elche v Athletic Bilbao
Mallorca v Real Betis
Osasuna v Espanyol
Sevilla v Rayo Vallecano
Valencia v Getafe
Villarreal v Granada

AUGUST 22
Alaves v Mallorca
Athletic Bilbao v Barcelona
Atletico Madrid v Elche
Espanyol v Villarreal
Getafe v Sevilla
Granada v Valencia
Levante v Real Madrid
Osasuna v Celta Vigo
Real Betis v Cadiz
Real Sociedad v Rayo Vallecano

AUGUST 29
Atletico Madrid v Villarreal
Barcelona v Getafe
Cadiz v Osasuna
Celta Vigo v Athletic Bilbao
Elche v Sevilla
Mallorca v Espanyol
Rayo Vallecano v Granada
Real Betis v Real Madrid
Real Sociedad v Levante
Valencia v Alaves

SEPTEMBER 12
Athletic Bilbao v Mallorca
Cadiz v Real Sociedad
Espanyol v Atletico Madrid
Getafe v Elche
Granada v Real Betis
Levante v Rayo Vallecano
Osasuna v Valencia
Real Madrid v Celta Vigo
Sevilla v Barcelona
Villarreal v Alaves

SEPTEMBER 19
Alaves v Osasuna
Atletico Madrid v Athletic Bilbao
Barcelona v Granada
Celta Vigo v Cadiz
Elche v Levante
Mallorca v Villarreal
Rayo Vallecano v Getafe
Real Betis v Espanyol
Real Sociedad v Sevilla
Valencia v Real Madrid

SEPTEMBER 22
Athletic Bilbao v Rayo Vallecano
Cadiz v Barcelona
Espanyol v Alaves
Getafe v Atletico Madrid
Granada v Real Sociedad
Levante v Celta Vigo
Osasuna v Real Betis
Real Madrid v Mallorca
Sevilla v Valencia
Villarreal v Elche

SEPTEMBER 26
Alaves v Atletico Madrid
Barcelona v Levante
Celta Vigo v Granada
Mallorca v Osasuna
Rayo Vallecano v Cadiz
Real Betis v Getafe
Real Madrid v Villarreal
Real Sociedad v Elche
Sevilla v Espanyol
Valencia v Athletic Bilbao

OCTOBER 3
Athletic Bilbao v Alaves
Atletico Madrid v Barcelona
Cadiz v Valencia
Elche v Celta Vigo
Espanyol v Real Madrid
Getafe v Real Sociedad
Granada v Sevilla
Mallorca v Levante
Osasuna v Rayo Vallecano
Villarreal v Real Betis

OCTOBER 17
Alaves v Real Betis
Barcelona v Valencia
Celta Vigo v Sevilla
Espanyol v Cadiz
Granada v Atletico Madrid
Levante v Getafe
Rayo Vallecano v Elche
Real Madrid v Athletic Bilbao
Real Sociedad v Mallorca
Villarreal v Osasuna

OCTOBER 24
Athletic Bilbao v Villarreal
Atletico Madrid v Real Sociedad
Barcelona v Real Madrid
Cadiz v Alaves
Elche v Espanyol
Getafe v Celta Vigo
Osasuna v Granada
Real Betis v Rayo Vallecano
Sevilla v Levante
Valencia v Mallorca

OCTOBER 27
Alaves v Elche
Celta Vigo v Real Sociedad
Espanyol v Athletic Bilbao
Granada v Getafe
Levante v Atletico Madrid
Mallorca v Sevilla
Rayo Vallecano v Barcelona
Real Betis v Valencia
Real Madrid v Osasuna
Villarreal v Cadiz

OCTOBER 31
Atletico Madrid v Real Betis
Barcelona v Alaves
Cadiz v Mallorca
Elche v Real Madrid
Getafe v Espanyol
Levante v Granada
Rayo Vallecano v Celta Vigo
Real Sociedad v Athletic Bilbao
Sevilla v Osasuna
Valencia v Villarreal

NOVEMBER 7
Alaves v Levante
Athletic Bilbao v Cadiz
Celta Vigo v Barcelona
Espanyol v Granada
Mallorca v Elche
Osasuna v Real Sociedad
Real Betis v Sevilla
Real Madrid v Rayo Vallecano
Valencia v Atletico Madrid
Villarreal v Getafe

NOVEMBER 21
Atletico Madrid v Osasuna
Barcelona v Espanyol
Celta Vigo v Villarreal
Elche v Real Betis
Getafe v Cadiz
Granada v Real Madrid
Levante v Athletic Bilbao
Rayo Vallecano v Mallorca
Real Sociedad v Valencia
Sevilla v Alaves

NOVEMBER 28
Alaves v Celta Vigo
Athletic Bilbao v Granada
Cadiz v Atletico Madrid
Espanyol v Real Sociedad
Mallorca v Getafe
Osasuna v Elche
Real Betis v Levante

Oct 31...Atletico Madrid v Real Betis

Jan 23...Real Madrid v Elche

Real Madrid v Sevilla
Valencia v Rayo Vallecano
Villarreal v Barcelona

DECEMBER 5

Atletico Madrid v Mallorca
Barcelona v Real Betis
Celta Vigo v Valencia
Elche v Cadiz
Getafe v Athletic Bilbao
Granada v Alaves
Levante v Osasuna
Rayo Vallecano v Espanyol
Real Sociedad v Real Madrid
Sevilla v Villarreal

DECEMBER 12

Alaves v Getafe
Athletic Bilbao v Sevilla
Cadiz v Granada
Espanyol v Levante
Mallorca v Celta Vigo
Osasuna v Barcelona
Real Betis v Real Sociedad
Real Madrid v Atletico Madrid
Valencia v Elche
Villarreal v Rayo Vallecano

DECEMBER 19

Athletic Bilbao v Real Betis
Barcelona v Elche
Celta Vigo v Espanyol
Getafe v Osasuna
Granada v Mallorca
Levante v Valencia
Rayo Vallecano v Alaves
Real Madrid v Cadiz
Real Sociedad v Villarreal
Sevilla v Atletico Madrid

JANUARY 2

Alaves v Real Sociedad
Atletico Madrid v Rayo Vallecano
Cadiz v Sevilla
Elche v Granada
Getafe v Real Madrid
Mallorca v Barcelona
Osasuna v Athletic Bilbao
Real Betis v Celta Vigo
Valencia v Espanyol
Villarreal v Levante

JANUARY 9

Alaves v Athletic Bilbao
Espanyol v Elche
Granada v Barcelona
Levante v Mallorca
Osasuna v Cadiz
Rayo Vallecano v Real Betis
Real Madrid v Valencia
Real Sociedad v Celta Vigo
Sevilla v Getafe
Villarreal v Atletico Madrid

JANUARY 19

Athletico Bilbao v Real Madrid
Atletico Madrid v Levante
Barcelona v Rayo Vallecano
Cadiz v Espanyol
Celta Vigo v Osasuna
Elche v Villarreal
Getafe v Granada
Mallorca v Real Sociedad
Real Betis v Alaves
Valencia v Sevilla

JANUARY 23

Alaves v Barcelona
Atletico Madrid v Valencia
Espanyol v Real Betis
Granada v Osasuna
Levante v Cadiz
Rayo Vallecano v Athletic Bilbao
Real Madrid v Elche
Real Sociedad v Getafe
Sevilla v Celta Vigo
Villarreal v Mallorca

FEBRUARY 6

Athletic Bilbao v Espanyol
Barcelona v Atletico Madrid
Celta Vigo v Rayo Vallecano
Elche v Alaves
Getafe v Levante
Mallorca v Cadiz
Osasuna v Sevilla
Real Betis v Villarreal
Real Madrid v Granada
Valencia v Real Sociedad

FEBRUARY 13

Alaves v Valencia
Atletico Madrid v Getafe
Cadiz v Celta Vigo
Espanyol v Barcelona
Levante v Real Betis
Mallorca v Athletic Bilbao
Rayo Vallecano v Osasuna
Real Sociedad v Granada
Sevilla v Elche
Villarreal v Real Madrid

FEBRUARY 20

Athletic Bilbao v Real Sociedad
Cadiz v Getafe
Celta Vigo v Levante
Elche v Rayo Vallecano
Espanyol v Sevilla
Granada v Villarreal
Osasuna v Atletico Madrid
Real Betis v Mallorca
Real Madrid v Alaves
Valencia v Barcelona

FEBRUARY 27

Atletico Madrid v Celta Vigo
Barcelona v Athletic Bilbao
Getafe v Alaves
Granada v Cadiz
Levante v Elche
Mallorca v Valencia
Rayo Vallecano v Real Madrid
Real Sociedad v Osasuna
Sevilla v Real Betis
Villarreal v Espanyol

MARCH 6

Alaves v Sevilla
Athletic Bilbao v Levante
Cadiz v Rayo Vallecano
Celta Vigo v Mallorca
Elche v Barcelona
Espanyol v Getafe
Osasuna v Villarreal
Real Betis v Atletico Madrid
Real Madrid v Real Sociedad
Valencia v Granada

MARCH 13

Atletico Madrid v Cadiz
Barcelona v Osasuna
Getafe v Valencia
Granada v Elche
Levante v Espanyol
Mallorca v Real Madrid
Rayo Vallecano v Sevilla
Real Betis v Athletic Bilbao
Real Sociedad v Alaves
Villarreal v Celta Vigo

MARCH 20

Alaves v Granada
Athletic Bilbao v Getafe
Cadiz v Villarreal
Celta Vigo v Real Betis
Elche v Valencia
Espanyol v Mallorca
Osasuna v Levante
Rayo Vallecano v Atletico Madrid
Real Madrid v Barcelona
Sevilla v Real Sociedad

APRIL 3

Athletic Bilbao v Elche
Atletico Madrid v Alaves
Barcelona v Sevilla
Celta Vigo v Real Madrid
Getafe v Mallorca
Granada v Rayo Vallecano
Levante v Villarreal
Real Betis v Osasuna
Real Sociedad v Espanyol
Valencia v Cadiz

APRIL 10

Cadiz v Real Betis
Elche v Real Sociedad
Espanyol v Celta Vigo
Levante v Barcelona
Mallorca v Atletico Madrid
Osasuna v Alaves
Rayo Vallecano v Valencia
Real Madrid v Getafe
Sevilla v Granada
Villarreal v Athletic Bilbao

Apr 3...Barcelona v Sevilla

APRIL 17

Alaves v Rayo Vallecano
Athletic Bilbao v Celta Vigo
Atletico Madrid v Espanyol
Barcelona v Cadiz
Elche v Mallorca
Getafe v Villarreal
Granada v Levante
Real Sociedad v Real Betis
Sevilla v Real Madrid
Valencia v Osasuna

APRIL 20

Atletico Madrid v Granada
Cadiz v Athletic Bilbao
Celta Vigo v Getafe
Espanyol v Rayo Vallecano
Levante v Sevilla
Mallorca v Alaves
Osasuna v Real Madrid
Real Betis v Elche
Real Sociedad v Barcelona
Villarreal v Valencia

MAY 1

Alaves v Villarreal
Athletic Bilbao v Atletico Madrid
Barcelona v Mallorca
Elche v Osasuna
Getafe v Real Betis
Granada v Celta Vigo
Rayo Vallecano v Real Sociedad
Real Madrid v Espanyol
Sevilla v Cadiz
Valencia v Levante

MAY 8

Athletic Bilbao v Valencia
Atletico Madrid v Real Madrid
Cadiz v Elche
Celta Vigo v Alaves
Espanyol v Osasuna
Getafe v Rayo Vallecano
Levante v Real Sociedad
Mallorca v Granada
Real Betis v Barcelona
Villarreal v Sevilla

MAY 11

Alaves v Espanyol
Barcelona v Celta Vigo
Elche v Atletico Madrid
Granada v Athletic Bilbao
Osasuna v Getafe
Rayo Vallecano v Villarreal
Real Madrid v Levante
Real Sociedad v Cadiz
Sevilla v Mallorca
Valencia v Real Betis

MAY 15

Athletic Bilbao v Osasuna
Atletico Madrid v Sevilla
Cadiz v Real Madrid
Celta Vigo v Elche
Espanyol v Valencia
Getafe v Barcelona
Levante v Alaves
Mallorca v Rayo Vallecano
Real Betis v Granada
Villarreal v Real Sociedad

MAY 22

Alaves v Cadiz
Barcelona v Villarreal
Elche v Getafe
Granada v Espanyol
Osasuna v Mallorca
Rayo Vallecano v Levante
Real Madrid v Real Betis
Real Sociedad v Atletico Madrid
Sevilla v Athletic Bilbao
Valencia v Celta Vigo

•All fixtures are for the weekend commencing rather than the exact date of the games

Club Football

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2021

Group Stage (East)

Group F

Jul 5 - Thanyaburi
Ulsan Hyundai 2 (Yoon 27, 51)
Kaya-Iloilo 1 (Bedic 47)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al-Yaqoubi (Oma)

Jul 5 - Thanyaburi
Viettel 1 (Pedro Paulo 23)
BG Pathum United 3 (Chaowat 56, Tunez 62, Diogo 64)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Sato (Jap)

Jul 8 - Thanyaburi
Kaya-Iloilo 0
BG Pathum United 1 (Sarach 83)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Mahfoodh (Bah)

Jul 8 - Thanyaburi
Ulsan Hyundai 3 (Qazaishvili 48, Hinterseer 55, Oh 86)
Viettel 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Evans (Aus)

Jul 11 - Thanyaburi
Viettel 1 (Caique 57)
Kaya-Iloilo 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hattab (Syr)

Jul 11 - Thanyaburi
BG Pathum United 0
Ulsan Hyundai 2 (Kim 31, Qazaishvili 87)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Faghani (Ira)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ulsan Hyundai (Q)	6	6	0	0	13	1	18
BG Pathum United (Q)	6	4	0	2	10	6	12
Viettel	6	2	0	4	7	9	6
Kaya-Iloilo	6	0	0	6	2	16	0

Group G

Jul 7 - Bangkok
Pohang Steelers 1 (Tashchy 88)
Nagoya Grampus 1 (Maeda 51)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Mohamed (UAE)

Jul 7 - Bangkok
Johor Darul Ta'zim 0
Ratchaburi Mitr Phol 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Qasim (Irq)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nagoya Grampus (Q)	6	5	1	0	14	2	16
Pohang Steelers (Q)	6	3	2	1	9	5	11
Johor Darul Ta'zim	6	1	1	4	3	9	4
Ratchaburi Mitr Phol	6	0	2	4	0	10	2

Group H

Jul 7 - Tashkent
Gamba Osaka 8 (Kurata 21, Kawasaki 25, 53, 80, Ichimi 28, Wellington 75, Patric 78, 87)
Tampines Rovers 1 (Bennett 27)
HT: 3-1. **Ref:** Yu (Tpe)

Jul 7 - Tashkent
Chiangrai United 1 (Bill 68 pen)
Jeonbuk Hyundai 3 (Barrow 9, Hong 20, Park 35)
HT: 0-3. **Ref:** Bonyadifard (Ira)

Jul 10 - Tashkent
Tampines Rovers 0
Chiangrai United 3 (Felipe Amorim 75, Bill 82, Phitiwat 90)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Yaacob (Mal)

Jul 10 - Tashkent
Jeonbuk Hyundai 2 (Gustavo 6 pen, Barrow 88)
Gamba Osaka 1 (Patric 53)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al-Kaf (Oma)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jeonbuk Hyundai (Q)	6	5	1	0	22	5	16
Gamba Osaka	6	2	3	1	15	7	9
Chiangrai United	6	2	2	2	8	7	8
Tampines Rovers	6	0	0	6	1	27	0

Group I

Jul 5 - Tashkent
United City 0
Kawasaki Frontale 2 (Chinen 18, Hasegawa 78)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al-Ali (UAE)

Jul 5 - Tashkent
Beijing Guoan 0
Daegu FC 3 (Kim 45, Jung 57, Liang Shaowen 76 og)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Gamini (Sri)

Jul 8 - Tashkent
Beijing Guoan 2 (Jiang Wenhao 1, Leng Jixuan 4)
United City 3 (Hartmann 59, 80, Maranon 69)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Ibrahim (Jor)

Jul 8 - Tashkent
Daegu FC 1 (Edgar 43)
Kawasaki Frontale 3 (Leandro Damiao 34, 64, 87)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Al-Jassim (Qat)

Jul 11 - Tashkent
United City 0
Daegu FC 4 (Nishi 37, Lee 48, Edgar 58, Jung 73)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Tantashev (Uzb)

Jul 11 - Tashkent
Kawasaki Frontale 4 (Chinen 21, Kozuka 37, 69, Miyagi 56)
Beijing Guoan 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Al-Hoish (Ksa)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kawasaki Frontale (Q)	6	6	0	0	27	3	18
Daegu FC (Q)	6	4	0	2	22	6	12
United City	6	1	1	4	4	24	4
Beijing Guoan	6	0	1	5	3	23	1

Group J

Jul 6 - Buriram
Cerezo Osaka 5 (Kato 33, 90+2, Matsumoto 57, 72, Pagnussat 67)
Guangzhou 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Heidari (Ira)

Jul 6 - Buriram
Port 1 (Pakorn 13)
Kitchee 1 (Orr 18)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Ko (Kor)

Jul 9 - Buriram
Kitchee 0
Cerezo Osaka 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Sabah (Irq)

Jul 9 - Buriram
Guangzhou 1 (Thitawee 49 og)
Port 5 (Suarez 5, Bordin 53, Rochela 56, Wang Wenxuan 76 og, Chappuis 90+3)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kim (Kor)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cerezo Osaka (Q)	6	4	2	0	13	2	14
Kitchee	6	3	2	1	6	3	11
Port	6	2	2	2	10	8	8
Guangzhou	6	0	0	6	1	17	0

AUSTRALIA

A-LEAGUE 2020-21

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Melbourne City (C)	26	15	4	7	57	32	49
Sydney FC	26	13	8	5	39	23	47
Central Coast Mariners	26	12	6	8	35	31	42
Brisbane Roar	26	11	7	8	36	28	40
Adelaide United	26	11	6	9	39	41	39
Macarthur FC	26	11	6	9	33	36	39
Wellington Phoenix	26	10	8	8	44	34	38
Western Sydney Wanderers	26	9	8	9	45	43	35
Perth Glory	26	9	7	10	44	44	34
Western United	26	8	4	14	30	47	28
Newcastle Jets	26	5	6	15	24	38	21
Melbourne Victory	26	5	4	17	31	60	19

Finals Series

Elimination Finals

Jun 12 - Gosford
Central Coast Mariners 0
Macarthur FC 2 (M'Mombwa 93, 120+1)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Evans (Aus)

Jun 13 - Brisbane
Brisbane Roar 1 (Parsons 56)
Adelaide United 2 (Juric 15, 19)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** King (Aus)

Semi-Finals

Jun 19 - Sydney
Sydney FC 2 (Le Fondre 24 pen, Bobo 43)
Adelaide United 1 (Juande 64)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Faghani (Ira)

Jun 20 - Sydney
Melbourne City 2 (Colakovski 54, Tilio 55)
Macarthur FC 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Elder (Aus)

Grand Final

Jun 27 - Melbourne
Melbourne City 3 (Atkinson 23, Jamieson 45+1 pen, Galloway 90+3)
Sydney FC 1 (Barbarouses 21)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Beath (Aus)

SOUTH AMERICA

2021 COPA LIBERTADORES

Round of 16 – 1st Leg

Jul 13 - Buenos Aires
Boca Juniors 0
Atletico Mineiro 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Rojas (Col)

Jul 13 - Asuncion
Cerro Porteno 0
Fluminense 2 (Nene 39, Egidio 61)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Tello (Arg)

Jul 13 - Sao Paulo
Sao Paulo 1 (Bueno 35)
Racing 1 (Copetti 45+1)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Ospina (Col)

Jul 14 - Buenos Aires
Defensa y Justicia 0
Flamengo 1 (Michael 21)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Aquino (Par)

Jul 14 - Santiago
Universidad Catolica 0
Palmeiras 1 (Veiga 42 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Matonte (Uru)

Jul 14 - Buenos Aires
Velez Sarsfield 1 (Lucero 7)
Barcelona 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Claus (Bra)

Jul 14 - Buenos Aires
River Plate 1 (Suarez 10)
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Hauche 40)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Arleu (Bra)

Jul 15 - Asuncion
Olimpia 0
Internacional 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Loustau (Arg)

2021 COPA SUDAMERICANA

Round of 16 – 1st Leg

Jul 13 - Pereira
America de Cali 0
Athletico Paranaense 1 (Nikao 73 pen)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Argote (Ven)

Jul 13 - Quito
Quito 0
Gremio 1 (Leo Pereira 19)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Garay (Chi)

Jul 14 - Sangolqui
Independiente del Valle 0
Red Bull Bragantino 2 (Fabricio Bruno 19, Ramires 66)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Tobar (Chi)

Jul 14 - Barranquilla
Junior 3 (Valencia 4, Piedrahita 36, Hinestroza 39)
Libertad 4 (Villalba 12, 14, Enciso 48, H. Martinez 70)
HT: 3-2. **Ref:** Sampaio (Bra)

Jul 14 - Lima
Sporting Cristal 2 (Hohberg 90 pen, 90+8)
Arsenal 1 (Mazzola 70)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Guerreri (Ecu)

Jul 15 - Montevideo
Nacional 1 (Bergessio 90+5)
Penarol 2 (Canobbio 45+2, Rodriguez 90+2)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)

Jul 15 - Santos
Santos 1 (Kaio Jorge 69)
Independiente 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

Jul 15 - San Cristobal
Deportivo Tachira 2 (Granados 59, Angarita 90+4)
Roasrio Central 2 (Ferreyra 26, Marinelli 90)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Rodrigues de Silva (Bra)

ARGENTINA

2021 Copa de la Liga Profesional

ZONE A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Colon	13	7	4	2	23	10	25
Estudiantes	13	6	4	3	16	10	22
River Plate	13	6	3	4	25	11	21
Racing	13	6	3	4	14	12	21
San Lorenzo	13	6	3	4	16	16	21
Banfield	13	5	5	3	14	12	20
Argentinos Juniors	13	5	4	4	14	11	19
Rosario Central	13	5	3	5	16	18	18
Central Cordoba	13	4	5	4	14	17	17
Godoy Cruz	13	4	3	6	18	24	15
Platense	13	4	2	7	12	19	14
Arsenal	13	3	3	7	11	23	12
Aldovisi	13	3	2	8	15	21	11

ZONE B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Velez Sarsfield	13	10	1	2	23	13	31
Boca Juniors	13	6	4	3	22	12	22
Independiente	13	6	2	5	16	10	20
Talleres	13	5	5	3	19	16	20
Lanus	13	6	1	6	18	18	19
Union	13	4	7	2	12	14	19
Atletico Tucuman	13	5	3	5	24	20	18
Gimnasia y Esgrima	13	3	6	4	15	20	15
Huracan	13	2	7	4	14	17	13
Patronato	13	4	0	9	12	17	12
Defensa y Justicia	13	3	3	7	15	21	12
Sarmiento	13	2	6	5	10	19	12
Newell's Old Boys	13	2	5	6	14	21	11

Final Stages

Quarter-Finals

May 15 - Santa Fe
Colon* 1 (Castro 13)
Talleres 1 (Fragapane 24)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Mastrangelo (Arg)
**Colon win 5-3 on penalties*

May 15 - La Plata
Estudiantes 0
Independiente* 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Echavarria (Arg)
**Independiente win 4-1 on penalties*

May 16 - Buenos Aires
Velez Sarsfield 0
Racing* 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Mastrangelo (Arg)
**Racing win 4-2 on penalties*

May1 6 - Buenos Aires
Boca Juniors* 1 (Tevez 10)
River Plate 1 (Alvarez 67)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Tello (Arg)
**Boca Juniors win 4-2 on penalties*

Semi-Finals

May 31 - San Juan
Independiente 0
Colon 2 (Rodriguez 20 pen, Pierotti 66)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Abal (Arg)

May 31 - SanJuan
Racing* 0
Boca Juniors 0
HT: 0--0. **Ref:** Herrera (Arg)
**Racing win 4-2 on penalties*

Final

Jun 4 - SanJuan
Colon 3 (Aliendro 57, Bernardi 71, Castro 85)
Racing 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)

CONCACAF

MEXICO

LIGA MX 2021

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cruz Azul (C)	17	13	2	2	26	11	41
America	17	12	2	3	26	14	38
Puebla	17	7	7	3	25	14	28
Monterrey	17	8	4	5	22	13	28
Santos Laguna	17	7	5	5	18	13	26
Leon	17	8	2	7	25	23	26
Atlas	17	7	4	6	20	15	25
Pachuca	17	6	5	6	20	19	23
Guadalajara	17	5	8	4	21	21	23
UANL	7	6	5	6	19	20	23
Toluca	17	6	4	7	26	24	22
Queretaro	17	6	3	8	19	25	21
Mazatlan	17	6	3	8	19	26	21
Tijuana	17	5	5	7	19	21	20
UNAM	17	4	6	7	10	12	18
Juarez	17	4	3	10	13	29	15
Atletico San Luis	17	3	3	11	20	33	12
Necaxa	17	2	5	10	14	29	11

Guardianes 2021 Final Phase

Reclassification

May 8 - Guadalajara
Atlas 1 (Furch 80)
UANL 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ramos (Mex)

May 8 - Torreon
Santos Laguna 5 (Gorriaran 21, Preciado 24, Aguirre 49, 62, Valdes 60 pen)
Queretaro 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Gomez (Mex)

May 9 - Leon
Leon 2 (Davila 45+1, Ambriz 89)
Toluca* 2 (Castaneda 17, Canelo 58)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Santander (Mex)
**Toluca win 4-2 on penalties*

May 9 - Pachuca
Pachuca 4 (Murillo 51, 80, De la Rosa 69, 89)
Guadalajara 2 (Antuna 10, 90+3 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ortiz (Mex)

Quarter-Finals – 1st Leg

May 12 - Toluca
Toluca 2 (Canelo 27 pen, Estrada 52 pen)
Cruz Azul 1 (Fernandez 34)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Ortiz (Mex)

May 12 - Guadalajara
Atlas 1 (Torres 59)
Puebla 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Santander (Mex)

May 13 - Pachuca
Pachuca 3 (Aguirre 29, Pardo 65, Chavez 90+4)
Club America 1 (Suarez 45+2)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Basulto (Mex)

May 13 - Torreon
Santos Laguna 2 (Aguirre 52, Preciado 63)
Monterrey 1 (Janssen 19)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Rojas (Mex)

Quarter-Finals - 2nd Leg

May 15 - Puebla
Puebla* 1 (1) (Santamaria 70 og)
Atlas 0 (1)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Robles (Mex)
**1–1 on aggregate. Puebla advance due to finishing higher in the classification table*

May 15 - Mexico City
Cruz Azul 3 (4) (Angulo 11, Rodriguez 80 pen, Gimenez 90+3)
Toluca 1 (3) (Canelo 14)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Gomez (Mex)

May 16 - Guadalupe
Monterrey 1 (2) (Meza 30)
Santos Laguna 1 (3) (Prieto 90+1)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ramos (Mex)

May 16 – Mexico City
Club America 4 (5) (Martinez 17 pen, 53, Fuentes 27, Suarez 73)
Pachuca* 2 (5) (Ibarra 5, Cabral 63 pen)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Guerrero (Mex)
**5–5 on aggregate. Pachuca win on away goals*

Semi-Finals - 1st Leg

May 19 - Pachuca
Pachuca 0
Cruz Azul 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Santander (Mex)

May 20 - Torreon
Santos Laguna 3 (Aguirre 1, 27, Preciado 72)
Puebla 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Ortiz (Mex)

Semi-Finals - 2nd Leg

May 22 - Mexico City
Cruz Azul 1 (1) (Gimenez 51)
Pachuca 0 (0)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ramos (Mex)

May 23 - Puebla
Puebla 1 (1) (Ormeno 54)
Santos Laguna 0 (3)
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Guerrero (Mex)

Final - 1st Leg

May 27 - Torreon
Santos Laguna 0
Cruz Azul 1 (Romo 71)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Guerrero (Mex)

Final - 2nd Leg

May 30 - Mexico City
Cruz Azul 1 (2) (Rodriguez 51)
Santos Laguna 1 (1) (Valdes 37)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Gomez (Mex)

AFRICA

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2020-21

Final

Jul 17 - Casablanca
Kaizer Chiefs 0
Al Ahly 3 (Sherif 53, Afsha 64, El-Sulaya 74)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ndabihawenimana (Bur)

CAF CONFEDERATION CUP 2020-21

Semi-Finals - 1st Leg

Jun 20 - Cairo
Pyramids 0
Raja 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ndabihawenimana (Bur)

Jun 20 - Garoua
Cotonsport 1 (Araina 29)
JS Kabylie 2 (Kerroum 45+2, Etame 62 og)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Omar (Egy)

Semi-Finals - 2nd Leg

Jun 27 - Casablanca
Raja 0 (0)
Pyramids 0 (0)*
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Sikazwe (Zam)
**Raja win 5-4 on penalties*

Jun 27 - Algiers
JS Kabylie 3 (5) (Zaka 6, 45+1, Souyad 37 pen)
Cotonsport 0 (1)
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Selmi (Tun)

Final

Jul 10 - Cotonou
Raja 2 (Rahimi 5, Malango 14)
JS Kabylie 1 (Zaka 46)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Gomes (Saf)

Internationals

2021 FIFA ARAB CUP

Qualifiers

Jun 19 - Doha
Libya 0
Sudan 1 (Abdel Rahman 15 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al-Adba (Qat)

Jun 20 - Doha
Oman 2 (Al-Ghassani 12, Al-Yahyaei 36 pen)
Somalia 1 (Gigli 54)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Bastien (Fra)

Jun 21 - Doha
Jordan* 3
South Sudan 0
HT: N/A. **Ref:** N/A
**Jordan awarded win after South Sudan forfeited the match due to positive COVID-19 cases*

Jun 22 - Doha
Mauritania 2 (Diakhite 18, Tanjy 85)
Yemen 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Mariani (Ita)

Jun 23 - Doha
Lebanon 1 (El-Helwe 46)
Djibouti 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bastien (Fra)

Jun 24 - Doha
Palestine 5 (Kharoub 35, Dabbagh 42, Seyam 56, 72, Batran 81)
Comoros 1 (Moussa 5)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Doveri (Ita)

Jun 25 - Doha
Bahrain 2 (Haram 74, Isa 90+4)
Kuwait 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ghorbal (Alg)

2021 CONCACAF GOLD CUP QUALIFIERS

First Round

Jul 2 - Fort Lauderdale
Haiti 6 (Nazon 26 pen, 59, Pierrot 33, Etienne 37 pen, Sutherland 72 og, Antoine 90)
Saint Vincent & Grenadines 1 (Edwards 42)
HT: 3-1. **Ref:** Nation (Jam)

Jul 2 - Fort Lauderdale
Trinidad & Tobago 6 (Molino 21 pen, Joseph 35, Telfer 45+2, Jud. Garcia 57, Moore 68, 82)
Montserrat 1 (Taylor 55)
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Calderon (Crc)

Jul 2 - Fort Lauderdale
Bermuda 8 (Wells 1, 14, 87 pen, Lambe 29, Leverock 39, Pearce 60 og, Crichlow 66, Lewis 67)
Barbados 1 (Holligan 45+1)
HT: 4-1. **Ref:** Fischer (Can)

Jul 3 - Fort Lauderdale
Cuba 0
French Guiana* 3
HT: N/A. **Ref:** N/A
**French Guiana awarded win due to COVID-19 related travel and visa challenges surrounding the Cuban team, forcing the match to be cancelled*

Jul 3 - Fort Lauderdale
Guadeloupe 2 (Phaeton 61, Mirval 67)
Bahamas 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Radix (Gre)

Jul 3 - Fort Lauderdale
Guatemala 4 (Greenidge 21 og, L. Martinez 54, Lom 71, J. Martinez 80)
Guyana 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Calderon (Crc)

Second Round

Jul 6 - Fort Lauderdale
Haiti 4 (Pierrot 23, 28, 34, Nazon 87 pen)
Bermuda 1 (Wells 80)
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Barton (Slv)

Jul 6 - Fort Lauderdale
Guatemala 1** (L. Martinez 17)
Guadeloupe* 1 (Phaeton 6)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Hernandez (Mex)
**Guadeloupe win 10-9 on penalties*
***Guatemala later qualified as the highest-ranked team not to qualify automatically after Curacao, who had qualified via the 2019–20 CONCACAF Nations League, withdrew due to a high number of positive COVID-19 cases*

Jul 6 - Fort Lauderdale
Trinidad & Tobago 1 (Molino 27)
French Guiana 1 (Abelinti 44)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Elfath (USA)
**Trinidad & Tobago win 8-7 on penalties*

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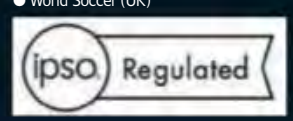

Patrick Kluivert

Ajax 1 Milan 0

1995 Champions League Final, Vienna

He was a raw 18-year-old prodigy when Ajax coach Louis van Gaal handed him a chance to play in the biggest game in European club football, yet Patrick Kluivert was ready to embrace the challenge. Some 26 years on from the night that changed his life, his memories of scoring the winning goal against Italian giants Milan are still vivid...

Winner...Kluivert lifts the Champions League trophy

"When you are 18 years old, you don't have any fear.

You just want to play, to experience everything as quickly as possible, even if it is the biggest game in European club football.

That is how I felt when Ajax reached the Champions League final in 1995. I just wanted to play, even if it was for one minute, because you never know when you will get another chance in a game of that importance.

We knew what we were doing and we knew it could work against Milan. They were an amazing team with Paolo Maldini, Franco Baresi and Alessandro Costacurta, and they had beaten Barcelona very easily [4-0] in the Champions League final the year before, but this was not our concern.

We went into the match feeling confident because we had beaten Milan twice in the group stage. But then you play in a final and it feels different somehow. Winning in the group was exciting for us and showed that we were good enough to compete with them, but winning the Champions League is bigger than we imagined.

You won't be surprised when I say I remember the final like it was yesterday. When you have a moment in your life that changes everything, even the small details remain with you.

I was on the bench and I remember feeling very nervous. I could see this amazing trophy on the side of the pitch and it was hard to believe how close we were to winning it.

Then the coach Louis van Gaal told me to go and warm up and I came on for Jari Litmanen.

Now we can talk about my goal! Marc Overmars had the ball on the left side, he played it to Edgar Davids, then it went to Frank Rijkaard and I was thinking: "Play me in, play me in".

I had to beat their goalkeeper and suddenly it felt like I had done something amazing. The team ran after me, I turned my shirt around and everyone piled on top of me.

Supersub... Kluivert looks on during the final

Maybe I was in shock because for a moment, I could not breathe. You see me on the video pushing the guys to get off me because I couldn't get my breath and it was a strange feeling.

Even when I got back to the halfway line and we started the match again, I was struggling to get my breath. I was thinking about what I had just done and maybe it was too much to understand. There were just five minutes left in the game and all I could think about was that maybe I'd just scored the goal to win the Champions League. I just hoped they couldn't come back because I knew what it would mean to both me and Ajax.

> Maybe I was in shock because for a moment, I could not breathe

Then the whistle went and everything changed for me in that moment.

I stayed at Ajax for a couple more years and then went to Milan before Van Gaal took me to Barcelona. Everything that happened in my career started with that night in the Champions League final. It was all my dreams becoming reality."

Interview by Kevin Palmer

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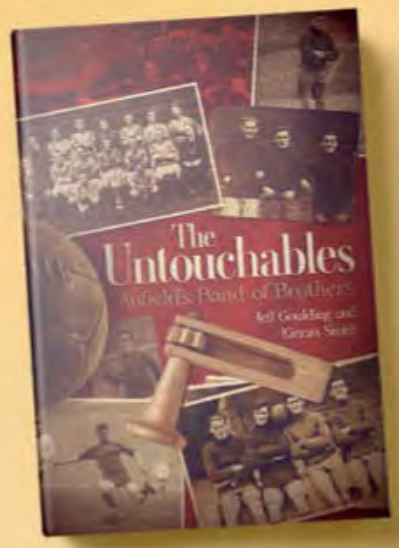

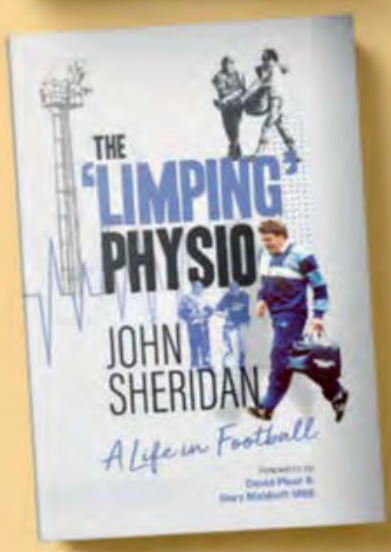

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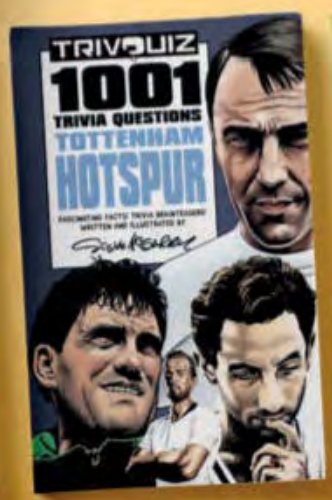

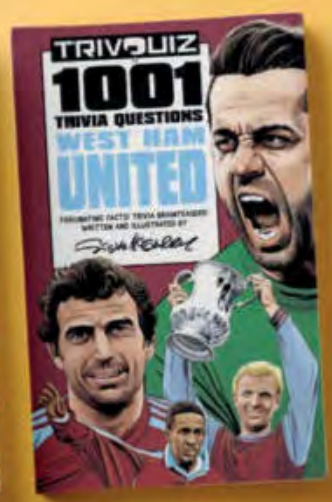

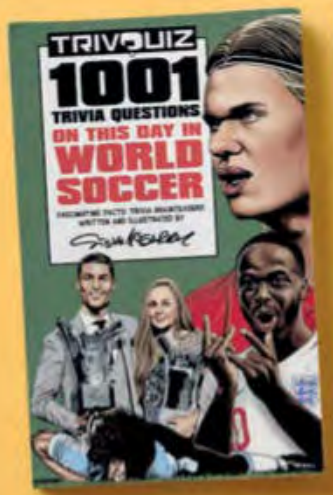

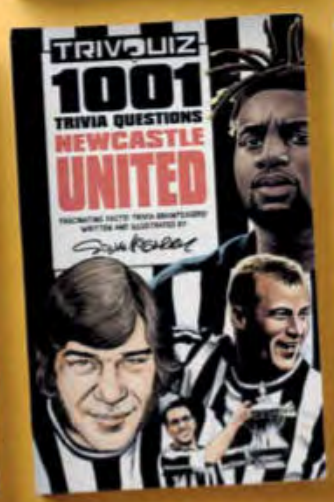

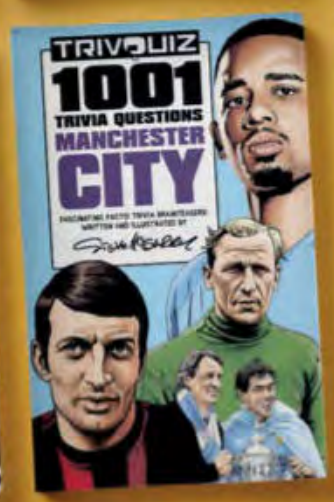

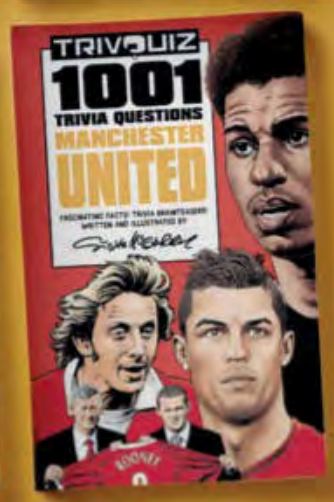

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